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# **History of UNION COUNTY, Oregon**

Edited and Compiled for the Historical  
Society of Union County, Oregon, by  
*Bernal D. Hug*  
Assisted by Many Hands

Printed by Eastern Oregon Review, La Grande, Ore.

## *"A Salute to Our Heritage"*

*And the pioneers looked upon this favored land and said,*

*"This will be our home.*

*This bounteous land will provide our needs and fill our souls.*

*Here we will live in peace.*

*Here we will work with each other.*

*And when we leave we will leave it clean and sparkling, rugged and restful, this lovely land, our heritage."*

*Glen R. McKenzie*

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Archae Clark - #6, pg 10/27/64

## I

# Introduction

In my medical care of many old people I noticed that the ranks were gradually being thinned by death and each one seemed to carry with him some historical information. It seemed necessary to gather without delay some of this information for a historical book representing the time from 1843 up to 1910 or 1920.

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Many of these older people were interviewed but this did not work out very well as many could not remember names or places and they were not sure about the dates. For that reason we had to drop back and depend on the written word. Even this was somewhat inaccurate and long hours were spent trying to find out something accurate about a specific incident. In spite of utmost care it is possible that errors have crept into this book. Some of these are simply differences of opinion or of reporting.

I was appointed to gather material for this history when the idea first originated, but because of increasing ill health, I turned the accumulated material over to Mrs. Doris Williamson, Mrs. Kathryn Snidder and Mrs. Regina Quaintance, and under the supervision of Bernal Hug and with the help of many others it is now being rewritten and edited in book form.

*C. L. Gilstrap, M.D.*

Financial aid from the 1959 State Centennial Committee and the 1961 County Centennial Committee have made the printing of this book possible.

To help complete the Union County History started by Dr. Gilstrap has been a pleasant task. Part of

## II

our heritage of pioneer stories can still be remembered, and it has been a satisfaction to help record them for the future.

Whole-hearted cooperation by all residents of Union County on this community project has displayed the pioneer spirit of a century ago; the spirit which we hope to preserve in this book.

The three ladies who were gathering material for Dr. Gilstrap have continued to assist. On days when Dr. Gilstrap has felt well enough for company, trips to his home have been rewarded with encouragement and wise counsel.

Members of the faculty of Eastern Oregon College have made many contributions. Dr. Lee Johnson placed in the hands of the committee a hundred page manuscript of local history. Quotations, sometimes entire paragraphs, of this manuscript were used without quotation marks, particularly in preparing chapters IV, VI and VIII. Miss Helen Bliss prepared chapter III. Dr. Alvin Kaiser assisted in preparing chapter XII. John Evans did the insert map of the county.

Various members of the Union County Historical Society have contributed portions of this history. Former chairman, Eva Martin, spent many hours sorting pictures and manuscripts and edited the story of La Grande, Hot Lake and Cove. Annetta (Johnson) Adskim, secretary of the society, did chapter IV. Miss Stella Edvalson gave much assistance on chapter XIV. Grace Powers, Wanneta Wilson, Chas. Hill, Mrs. Phillip Blais, J. K. Charlton, Orlin J. Anson, Jim Woodell, Mr. and Mrs. Glenn McKenzie, Mrs. Henry McGoldrick, Mrs. Lema Fuller, all gathered information for some community.

Three years ago some forty residents of north

### III

Union County helped me prepare a history of Elgin; portions of which were copied. John Skovlin did the story of Starkey and some Indian research. Mr. Gilbert Conner of Pendleton, a Nez Perce, and his wife, a Umatilla, have supplied interesting Indian history. Virginia Hug spent many hours proof-reading copy.

This is OUR centennial history, compiled and written by US. It would be impossible to list all who have helped. However, here are some of the ones that should have mention:

Harvey Ruckman  
Eldridge Huffman  
Mrs. Chas. Boswell  
Lamarr Westenskow  
Mrs. Frank Anlen  
Guy Smith  
J. A. Nice  
Mrs. Jennie O'Bryant  
Mrs. Fred Spain  
Dick Benson  
Mrs. Cinda South  
Nora Jones  
Oregon Trail Lumber Co.  
Edison Spears  
Gilbert Courtright  
Eastern Oregon Experiment Station  
Oregon State Highway Department  
Gerald Strickler  
Roy Townsend  
Ruth Hughes

Helen McClune  
Mrs. Bennie Hicks  
Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Hill  
Perry's Studio, La Grande  
Mt. Emily Lumber Co.  
Mrs. Eva Duncan  
Mrs. Helen Conklin  
Mrs. Robert Deal  
Artina Fihn  
Mrs. Jean Birnie  
Dr. Ken Williamson  
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Fletcher  
Mr. and Mrs. David Stoddard, California  
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Snider  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Heyden  
Mr. and Mrs. Stowell Weimer  
Grande Ronde Hospital  
Mrs. Robert Eakin  
The Arthur H. Clark Company, Publishers, Glendale, Calif.

*Bernal D. Hug  
President, Union County  
Historical Society*

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# Chapter I

# *Geography*

Before the turn of the century Professor Condon of the University of Oregon, had become one of the nation's outstanding geologists. He published a book entitled "The Two Islands", wherein he told of an age when all the land that is now Oregon was under the tropical seas except a mountainous island in the southwest of the present state, and another such island in the northeastern part of the state. A later edition of his book was printed under the title of "Oregon Geology" to conform to a revision stating that the mountains in the northeast might have been connected to the Rocky Mountains by a neck of land and actually might have been a peninsula.

Be that detail as it may, the point of interest is, the Blue Mountains were in the long ago washed by tropical seas and have never been under water since. Therefore they are basically a very, very old range of mountains with some more recent peaks, such as those of the Wallowas, thrust up among them.

They occupy a sizeable area in northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington and were first called Blue Mountains by the British explorer, David Thompson of the Northwest Fur Company. In his journal of August 8, 1811, he reports of seeing the ". . . Blue Mountains between the Shawpatin and Snake Indians . . ." Other early visitors to the eastern Oregon region, including Peter Skeen Ogdern and the naturalist, David Douglas, continued to use the name "Blue Mountains", the name, of course, being applied because of the peculiar and beautiful azure color they assume from a distance.

The Grande Ronde river drains the central part of the Blue Mountains. The name Grande Ronde is undoubtedly of French origin, and dates back to the days of the early explorers and French fur traders. In 1827 Peter Skeen Ogden in his journal of September 14, states that his party reached "Clay River, or commonly called Riviere de Grande Ronde". The name "Clay" may have originated because of the peculiar yellow color in the lower part of the river at seasons when erosion was taking place.

Union county includes mostly land drained by the upper portion of the Grande Ronde river and in the center of the county is the level and fertile Grande Ronde Valley of some 15 miles in diameter, and just north and below it, Indian Valley with its surrounding rolling hills. In 1843 when Captain Fremont traveled across Grande Ronde and Indian Valleys while exploring and mapping the west, he stated that some day this would be an important agricultural county.

The Grande Ronde Valley is today one of the most productive agricultural regions of the west. It is an old lake bed; even Indian tradition substantiates this idea.

Indian Valley is a smaller lake bed of rather recent formation. The hills of Cricket Flat and Palmer Valley are remains of older lakes, Cricket Flat much older, tilted, and eroded. Grande Ronde Valley and the Indian Valley region differ widely in soil. Each was a separate Indian land and each today has its own soil conservation district.

Union county, with an area of 2,032 square miles and the general shape of a triangle, covers the upper drainage of the Grande Ronde River, with the base of the triangle to the south and the apex pointing north.

It is entirely surrounded by timber covered mountains except in the center of the south side where sagebrush covered hills with clumps of pine trees separate it from Baker Valley.

The county is bounded on the west by Umatilla, on the east by Wallowa, on the east two thirds of the south side by Baker, and on the west end of the south side by Grant.



#### CENTER OF THE UNITED STATES

China Cap on left and Burger Butte right on the sky line. The center of the United States is in the canyon between them. This picture was taken looking North East from the Sandpass area of upper Catherine Creek.

The southeast corner of Union county extends into some of the most rugged, alpine mountains of the Blue Range known as the Wallowa Mountains. On the side of 8,600 ft. China Cap Peak of southeastern Union County has been located the exact center,

north to south, east to west, of the 50 states of the Union.

The southwest corner of the county is a large area that bulges the triangle to include the many head waters of the Grande Ronde River, with moderate sized, timber covered mountains.

The beautiful Grande Ronde Valley starts near the center of the south side of the county and extends down the river north to a gap between Harris Mt. and Pumpkin Ridge. Below this point Indian Valley and the rolling hills of Cricket Flat border the river nearly to the north end of the county.

## Chapter II

# *Days of the Indian*

### Ancient Man:

Thousands of years before the pyramids of Egypt were built the Indians of North America had their own type of civilization and were living in all parts of the continent. A 1957 publication of the Denver Museum of Natural history, "Ancient Man in North America" by H. M. Wormington, describes Indian artifacts from nearly a hundred locations well scattered over the continent; artifacts that were unearthed together with carbon bearing material, which by the carbon 14 test for radioactivity gave dates of thousands of years of age.

In the Fort Rock area of central Oregon skillfully made sandals woven of sagebrush fibers were secured from a dry cave. These tested some 9,000 years of age. This area also contains large numbers of stone implements that were used when the area had more rainfall, supposedly before the Cascade Mountains were as high as at present.

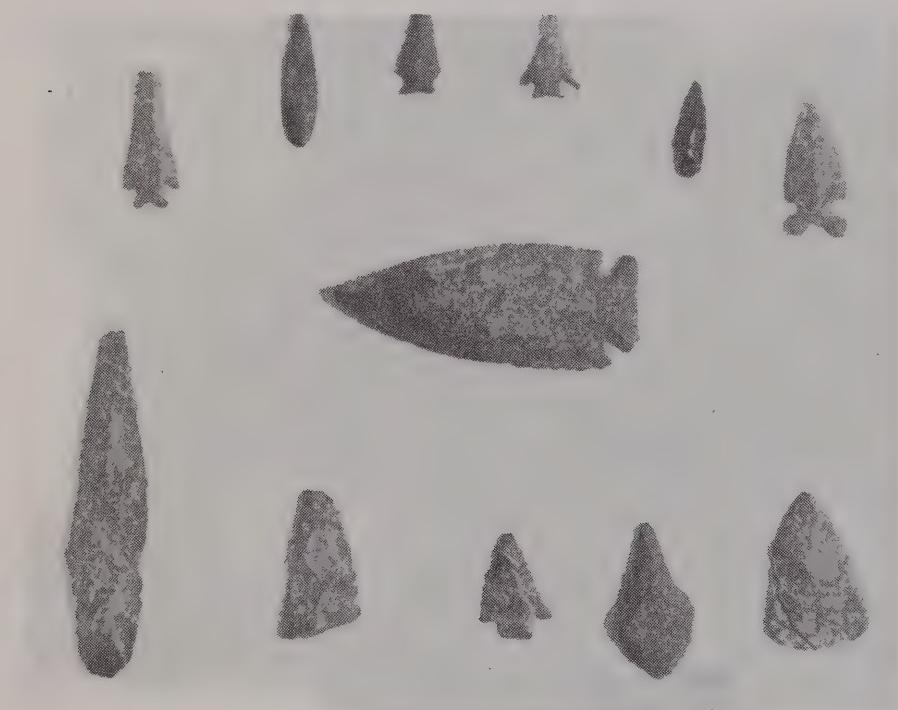
At Five Mile Rapids on the Columbia River east of The Dalles, Oregon, an Indian camp ground was explored and it proved to have been in continuous use from 10,000 years ago up to the coming of white men.

In a coulee near Lind Washington, many artifacts were taken and their age fixed at 6,000 years.

One unusual feature of Indian civilization is that it seemed to change little from century to century. Before flooding above Fort Peck Dam east of the Rocky Mountains, careful examination was made of

Indian mounds, which although 8,000 years old proved to be remains of dwellings exactly like that in which Sacajawea was keeping house with her husband in that area when Lewis and Clark hired them to go with them to the Pacific Ocean in 1804. Indian artifacts of all ages seem to be in general of about the same quality of design and workmanship.

Although no dated material has thus far been recovered from Union county, there is every reason to believe that since surrounding areas were inhabited, the valleys of the Grande Ronde River with their abundance of natural food would not be overlooked.



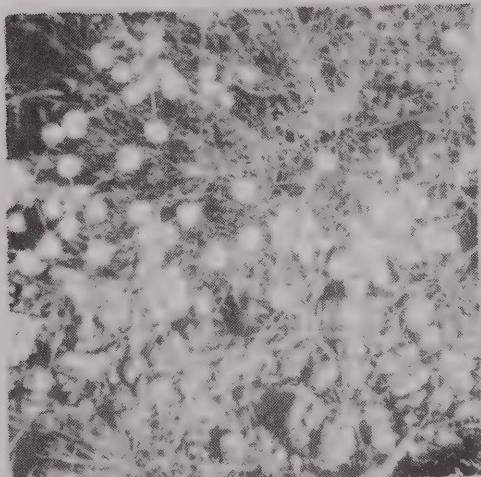
#### ARTIFACTS FROM RUSH BASEMENT AT ELGIN

At the site of Lochow Lochow, the central Indian camp of the lands of the Grande Ronde, where Elgin now stands, the Eldon Rush family dug a basement for their house. The top row of artifacts were taken from the top six inches of soil; the bottom row from a depth of two and three feet.

## A Summer Paradise:

That portion of Union County south of Mt. Harris and Pumpkin Ridge roughly comprises the Indian land of Cop Copi (land where the cotton woods grow). The part of the county to the north was the land of Hunaha. Farther down the Grande Ronde in the Wenaha area was the land of Waloua. These three separate valleys of the present Grande Ronde River area, were in ancient days, three intertribal land areas with a unique Indian history. They were a loved and sacred area of peace, plenty, romance and sport.

Each spring when the snows left the trails over the high hills that so effectively shut the Grande Ronde valleys off from the outside, men, women and children walked up these mountain paths on their way to this favored land. Nez Perce, Walla Walla,



### COUSE

The Indian vegetable course makes many rocky hillsides of Union County golden each spring with its blossoms.



### BLUE CAMAS BLOSSOMS

A sea of blue camas blossoms in the little meadow from which the Cricket Flat area was named. A very important Indian vegetable.

Cayuse, Umatilla, and sometimes others tribes came. This land was away from the hot summer lays. It was a land blessed by the Great Spirit who had richly endowed it for man. It had the revered healing waters of Hot Lake and Medical Springs, and produced a wide variety of medicinal plants; there was an abundance of vegetables, berries and game. Here people could camp under the shade of large trees by the side of a stream or spring, and feel a closeness to the Great Spirit; enjoy an abundant life. In this land boys who were becoming young men would go that summer in solitude onto one of the high mountains to spend several days in vigil of fast and communion with the Great Spirit, after which they would return to take their places as young men.

From the Camas Moon (June) through the Thunder Moon (July), the Huckleberry Moon (August), and the Hunters Moon (September), men of different tribes lived in peace and plenty in the valleys of the Grande Ronde, close to the Great Spirit, enjoying yet conserving Mother Earth's foods, happy with life. When the Moon of "Plenty of Food" (October) came, the mountain trails again were lined with folks trudging back to the warmer regions of the Snake and Columbia rivers, carrying great baskets of dried food, vegetables, meat, berries and herbs; supplies to tide them over the "Long Night Moon" (December), the "Snow Moon" (January) and the "Hungry Moon" (February).

### The Horse:

Centuries of stagnated civilization due to a lack of power and domestic animals came to an end during the early years of the 1700s when horses were brought to the Blue Mountains. Oliver LaFarge, an authority on American Indians, places the date that

the Umatillas obtained their first horse at 1739. According to local Indians the Cayuse tribe was the first to secure horses, which is the reason that local Indian ponies have since been called Cayuse ponies.

Indians are by no means slow to adopt new methods and needless to say surrounding tribes soon had horses. Probably no race of men have ever encountered a change so far reaching as that brought to the Indians by the introduction of the horse. Here was an animal that could live on the native bunch grass and thrive. It could be easily handled and was strong enough to carry a big man or a heavy load. In time of famine, which always faced the Indians, it could furnish good meat. Men could and did ride the horses across the Rocky Mountains to hunt buffalo and the horses carried back the dry meat and hides. It brought distant tribes into contact, and often conflict. Life was changing.

### White Men:

Before long the white man followed the horse. Wise men had related strange visions of the written word of the Great Spirit, of sticks that could be pointed at a man or animal and cause death, of small sticks that could be rubbed and fire would spring forth, and other strange prophecies. These things were being introduced by the new pale faced men.

Unfortunately, white men also brought new diseases and vices. They failed to understand the Indians' deep feeling of love of nature and his ideals of right and wrong. Heartaches were also coming with the white man. Conflicts resulted. However, in the Grande Ronde valleys, the Indian's land of peace, as a whole, the red men stayed friendly to the white men.

The only armed encounter in the area took place place on July 17, 1856, near the present city of La Grande, Oregon. The Yakimas were encouraged by victories over the whites and had called a conference of all northwest tribes to plan a campaign to drive white men from the country. The intertribal area of the Grande Ronde was chosen for a place of meeting.

A Nez Perce subchief, Captain John, learning of this meeting, was displeased at the prospect of war. He contacted the commander at Fort Walla Walla, guided the troops across the mountains at night and assisted in winning the Battle of the Grande Ronde the following day.

In 1878, when the Bannocks were belligerent, the Umatillas assisted the whites in defeating them before they reached the Grande Ronde, in fact the Umatillas succeeded in killing the Bannock chief, Egan.

When the valleys of the Grande Ronde were settled by white men they built their homes in the main camp at Lochow Lochow in Indian Valley. Yet Indians came each summer to set their salmon traps, trade at the white man's store and live as neighbors.

### Mountain Character:

It is said that rugged mountains develop strong character in the men who live among them. This had gone on for centuries in the Blue Mountains. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce was a substantiating example. Misunderstood and mistreated, this great man was forced to fight as he was driven from the Wallowas. He was a convert to Christianity and a man of peace, yet when driven to war, proved a commander equal to Napoleon or Alexander The Great.

Before the conflict Chief Joseph would, each year,

bring his people to the Grande Ronde and camp. He became a good friend of Billy Hindman, the pioneer school teacher who took up the first homestead in the Cricket Flat region. Chief Joseph camped near Billy's house and neighbored with him while his people dug camas in the meadows of Cricket Flat. When the conflict took place in 1877, neighbors asked Billy to go to the fort for protection. He only laughed at them and said, "Those people are my friends; they will never harm me".



**CHIEF JOSEPH**

Chief Joseph, the great man of the Blue Mountains.



**BILLY HINDMAN**

Billy Hindman, pioneer school teacher, friend of men, and friend of Chief Joseph.

## Integration:

Time is slowly bringing a better understanding between the white man and the Indian. The deeper and finer qualities of the Indian are being better appreciated. A half century ago in the country of the Umatillas, the Pendleton Roundup was started as an annual event with a definite participation by local Indians. A number of years ago in the land of the

Nez Perce, at Joseph, Oregon, Chief Joseph Days were instituted as an annual celebration in honor of the great chief for which the town was named.

White men have built a college at La Grande, Oregon, in the Indian's land of peace, plenty, romance, sport and culture. In 1960, the first annual Indian Festival of Arts was held in the shadows of that college; a place where Indians from all parts of North America bring their arts and crafts in a common atmosphere of culture to create an abundant life for all Americans.

## Chapter III

# *The Fur Traders and Explorers*

### **Early Fur Traders:**

The attraction to the Pacific Northwest in the beginning was in the furs which could be found in abundance in the streams and in the ocean and with native Indians in residence, seemingly ready source of cheap labor was available to gather in the harvest.

Ships had been visiting the west coast of America for over a hundred years but land explorations were much later. However, the Hudson's Bay Company and, more particularly its rival, the North West Company were both active in the Oregon territory in the later 1700's. By 1810, they were well established and the North West Company had trading posts on the Spokane, Kootenay, Kullyspell and other rivers to the north but none at or near the mouth of the Columbia.

The proximity of the trappers to the north and northeast would indicate that there had been white men through the Grande Ronde Valley as there were furs in abundance in this area and where the furs were, there were the trappers.

The Grande Ronde Valley was on regular Indian trails used by the various tribes who came into the valley from all directions to hunt, fish and gather the camas bulbs. This valley was neutral ground without any permanent villages established.

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 lent momentum to the interest in the area and Lewis and Clark, who

had already begun to organize their expedition hurried their preparations and left the next year (1804).

Their journey took them through the Idaho Bitter Root mountains and down the Clearwater River to the Snake and thence to the Columbia thus skirting the northern edge of Oregon.

John Jacob Astor, who already had trappers in the Rocky Mountains, saw the opportunity for riches further west. He sent ships to the mouth of the Columbia to establish a trading post and then sent overland an expedition with Wilson Price Hunt as its leader.

### Wilson Price Hunt:

With the Wilson Price Hunt's Overland Astorians begins the written history of the Grande Ronde valley. After spending the winter of 1810-11 at camp above St. Louis, the expedition began its slow, laborious and sometimes disastrous journey to the Pacific. Thirty-five hundred devious miles and 340 days later they reached their goal on February 16, 1812.

In the expedition were Pierre Dorion, French Canadian - Sioux half breed interpreter and his Iowa Indian wife and 2 children, 2 and 4 years of age. This Indian woman has been called Madam Dorion probably because her Indian name was hard to anglicize. She was three months pregnant when her husband joined the expedition. She had to care for her two small children, bear the burdens of a squaw and suffer the sullen temper of her husband.

After reaching the desert of Idaho, the expedition began to disintegrate. Food was very scarce or nonexistent and all were on starvation rations. At

times they had no water. They did not know how far they were from the Pacific. Their energies were low. Two men were drowned, one died of starvation, six had to be left on the Snake as they could not travel and it was felt that they had been left to die.



#### HUNT HALL

Hunt Hall, Men's Dormitory at Eastern Oregon College in La Grande. This hall was named for Wilson Price Hunt of the Astorian-Overland Expedition 1811-1812.

Through all this, Madam Dorion showed a perseverance and stamina which was an example to the men. She had to see her children grow thin and weak and as her own strength ebbed her pregnancy became more advanced.

On December 30, 1811, her time came and shelter was made for her in a small valley northeast of North Powder. There her husband stayed with her. The next day, they came into Hunt's camp in the Grande Ronde Valley, Madam Dorion riding the thin

starved horse which Pierre had fiercely defended against all pressure to have killed for food. Thus was born the first child on the Oregon Trail known to have white blood in its veins.

This valley must have been a glimpse of heaven to the weary starving expedition. The surrounding mountains were covered with snow and they had been wading through it for many days but the valley lay under sunshine and was entirely free from snow. Six lodges of Indians were camped on a bright clear stream and food was to be had.

January 1, 1812, was spent in feasting on horse and dog meat which they found delicious. The French Canadian voyageurs always enjoyed holidays and this was a time to rejoice. They knew the Columbia and the Pacific were not too far away. They were reaching a land of which they had some knowledge. Thus the first day of written history of the Grande Ronde Valley was that of feasting and recuperation.

The next day they journeyed to the west and on the seventh day within sight of the plains of the Columbia, the Dorion baby died. There is no mention of its sex nor of its burial. There had been little chance of its survival from the beginning of its life.

The next party which crossed the valley was that led by Robert Stuart who had come to Astoria on the Astor ship "Tonquin". This small party had been sent back to St. Louis with dispatches for Mr. Astor who had not heard a word from his expeditions for two years. They back tracked Hunt's trail. On August 5, 1812, a Wednesday, they camped on the site of La Grande. They rested on the sixth and repaired saddles and equipment. On the seventh they camped about two miles S.S.W. of Union. Stuart de-

scribed the sulphur lake which is now Hot Lake. The noisome fumes were very evident. The elk congregated at the lake and their antlers covered the ground. Stuart speaks of the excellent soil, the tall grass, cool clear water, the abundance of deer, raccoon, elk, beaver and salmon.

In September, 1812, another party of Astorians led by John Reed passed through the valley on their way to Caldron Linn in Idaho where Hunt had cached his equipment. Reed found the caches looted but he brought back to Astoria all that was left. He returned by way of the Clearwater river to the north of Oregon.

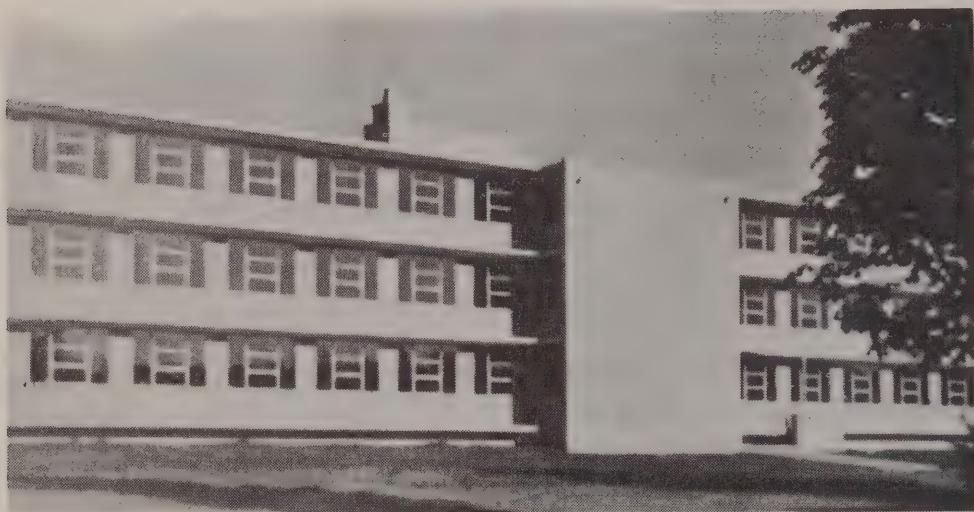
In July, 1813, John Reed was again sent to the plains of Idaho, this time with a party of trappers. With him were Pierre Dorion and his family. The Indians were troublesome and Reed was forced to move to a second area and they divided into two parties to cover the trapping grounds more effectively.

### Madam Pierre Dorion:

On the 19th of January, 1814, a friendly Indian told Reed of the massacres of those in the other camp. Madam Dorion, fearing for her husband, took her children on a horse and rode to where her husband had been trapping and found all in that party dead except one whom she nursed for a day until he also died. She returned to the first cabin where she found those had also been killed. She had escaped because she had been riding between the two places at the time the Indians struck.

She gathered together dried fish from the cabin although it took all her will power to enter the scene of carnage. She put the food and her children on

the horse and for the third time traveled the trail through the Blue Mountains. In the Grande Ronde Valley, she and the horse could go no further, so she built a shelter, killed the horse with her only tool, a knife, dried the meat and wintered in a cove probably near Hilgard. After 53 days, food became short and



#### **DORION HALL**

Dorion Hall, Women's Dormitory at Eastern Oregon College in La Grande, was named for Madam Pierre Dorion, Indian wife of the half-breed interpreter of the Astorian-Overland Expedition. She was the mother of the first child born in Eastern Oregon with white blood in his veins. The child was born December 30, 1811 near North Powder and died on January 7, 1812.

she was forced to move toward the Columbia which she reached in a starved condition in April, 1814. Here she hailed a party of Astorians on their way to search for Reed.

During the next decade, the country was left to the fur trappers who combed the valleys and streams for the beaver. These were individuals in the employ of the British and American fur companies. Some of these are well known in the history of

the mountain men: Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, William and Milton Sublette, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Henry Fraeb, John Baptiste Gervais. Some of these are known to have been in this area. Britishers included Donald McKenzie and Alexander Ross, sometimes Astorians, but later employed by the North West Company. Peter Skeen Ogden went through the valley at least twice as a Hudson's Bay trader.

### The Explorers:

Beginning the 1830's, men interested in their own advancement and with their own money or with backing from private individuals, organized expeditions for the purposes of seeing what they could get out of the country for themselves, either riches or fame.

Such a man was Captain Benjamin Louis Bonneville who obtained leave from the army to explore the country. On his first trip to Oregon, his trail led along the Snake River and by way of the Imnaha country. On his second expedition, he passed the night of August 31, 1834, in the Grande Ronde Valley on his way from his fort on the Portneuf to Ft. Walla Walla.

Washington Irving in his book "The Adventures of Captain Bonneville" has this description of the valley as given by Bonneville.

"This is a beautiful and very fertile valley, about twenty miles long and five or six broad; a bright cold stream called the 'Fourche de Glace', or Ice River, runs through it. Its sheltered situation embosomed in mountains, renders it good pasturage ground in the winter time; when the elk come down to it in great numbers driven out of the mountains by the snow. The Indians then re-

sort to it to hunt. They likewise come to it in the summer to dig the camash root, of which it produces immense quantities. When this plant is in bloom, the whole valley is tinted by its blue flowers, and looks like the ocean when overcast by a cloud".

Another adventurer in the territory during these same years was Nathaniel J. Wyeth who wanted to be on the ground floor when the joint occupancy of the Oregon territory by the British and Americans ended. He made two expeditions through this area. On October 12, 1832, he camped in a valley about 29 miles long and 15 wide, with very fertile soil, extensive Indian camps, with kamas roots and salmon. He speaks of the streams being trapped out by the mountain men.

On his second expedition, an entry dated August 31, 1834, he says:

"made 15 miles N.N.W. good soil and not very hilly and nooned at the Grande Ronde where I found some Kiuse Indians, Capt. Bonneville and two of McKay's men and learned that Capt. Stewart and Mr. Lee (Jason Lee) passed two days before. Afternoon took the Walla Walla Trail N.N. W. 12 miles and camped at a very small Prairie with a little stream going N.W."

George Bancroft did not like Washington Irving and was especially critical of his book on Captain Bonneville. Bancroft gives a picture of one of Bonneville's wives, who was a Nez Perce, at his camp on the Grande Ronde in August 31, 1834.

"There (Nathaniel Wyeth) found Bonneville and his company. This Amateur forester, with a

troop of Nez Perce and Cayuse at his heels, visited Wyeth's camp, and by his broad genial good humor, which then happily possessed him, and his French manners, created a favorable impression. Meanwhile flitting in the distance astride a sleek bay gayly caparisoned, the mane and tail tied full of scarlet and blue ribbons, was a beautiful damsel glittering in finery, loaded with bells, beads, and rings fastened to broad bands of scarlet cloth, who managed her horse as being part of it, but held aloof as the property of one who booked no familiarity in the matter of mistresses."

With Wyeth in 1834 were Dr. Thomas Nuttall, naturalist; J. K. Townsend, ornithologist; Rev. Jason Lee, his nephew, Daniel Lee and 3 other missionaries who were the first pioneer missionary party.

Marcus Whitman had been with Wyeth but he turned back at Ft. Hall to return to the states to recruit missionaries to the work in Oregon. He was married to Narcissa Prentice and with a party, among whom was Rev. and Mrs. H. H. Spalding, returned to the Columbia. Two of his wagons were abandoned at Ft. Laramie. The third wagon arrived intact at Ft. Hall where it was reduced to a cart which in turn was abandoned at Ft. Boise.

On August 28, 1836, Marcus and Narcissa lingered alone on top of the hill overlooking the Grande Ronde valley. They had been married about six months. Narcissa looked upon the valley and found it beautiful.

When Jason Lee returned to the states in 1838, he lectured about the opportunities in Oregon to such effect that the Peoria party was organized to found a city in the west and to pack and sell salmon. The

first section of this party crossed the Grande Ronde valley September 22, 1839, a Friday. This was the first party with the stated intention to settle in Oregon territory.

In 1843, Marcus Whitman again went to the states and returned with a party of emigrants whom he conducted from Fort Hall to the Grande Ronde valley. These were the first wagons to go the full way to the Columbia on the Oregon Trail. In 1830, three men including Joseph L. Meek, had taken three wagons from St. Louis to Walla Walla by another route.

On October 17, 1843, Colonel John Charles Fremont on his second expedition to the west, entered the valley on his way to Fort Vancouver. With him was Kit Carson as a guide and Thomas Fitzpatrick, trapper. He, as had all others, admired the scenery and told of the richness of soil and of the salubrious climate. He left the emigrant trail which led to the left over the mountains and continued to the north on an Indian trail which went to Walla Walla. Fremont, while still attached to the army and expected to examine and report on the character of the country to the military authorities, had his own interests at heart and was eager to surpass other explorers such as Lewis and Clark, Zebullon Pike, Long and others.

### The Emigrants:

The years 1832 and 1836 was the period when the first missionaries came to Oregon along with the adventurers and explorers. While there were 25 residents at the close of 1834, there were no arrivals in 1835, and none of these stayed in the Grande Ronde Valley.

The immigration of 1841 and 1843 found permanent settlers arriving but all passed through on their way to the Willamette Valley.

By 1849, there were so many wagon trains over the Oregon Trail that they were asking for protection from the Indians. Major Osborne Cross was sent by the army with mounted riflemen to establish military posts along the trail and conduct the wagon trains of that year through to the Pacific. On September 8th, 1849, they entered the Grande Ronde Valley and left it on the 10th. For most emigrants, the valley was a place to rest and repair their outfits for the final pull over the Blue Mountains.

Most of those going through in the fall of the year tell of the fires which they encountered in this area. The Indians set fire to the grass to burn off the old and let the new grass start. Some fires were the result of lightning. Major Cross encountered such as did Bonneville and many others.

The travels of these fur trappers, the traders, the explorers and the adventurers resulted in a gradually well defined route with trails, mountain crossings and deserts explored until by 1843 there was a road from St. Louis or Independence, Missouri, to the Columbia known as the Oregon Trail.

It could be said that the wild animals had first surveyed this route as the animals would have followed the path of least resistance, the Indians would have followed the animal trails and the explorers followed the Indian trails. The modern highway follows that of the pioneers with modifications and is called U. S. 30.

In 1861, E. D. Pierce with 20 companions explor-

ed Malheur, Burnt, Powder and Grande Ronde rivers in search of gold. Prospectors struck gold in Griffins Gulch near where the town of Auburn later stood.

By October of that year, 40 men had arrived and taken claims in the Grande Ronde Valley. In 1862, gold was found on the Powder River, Salmon River and Canyon Creek.

Now other roads were needed for the transportation of supplies from the nearest supply station at Walla Walla. In July, 1862, the road was repaired from Walla Walla over the Blue Mountains to Phillips Creek near Elgin over a route known as Linkton road. The road continued on through the valley over Pyles canyon to the Powder River.

Pioneers say that in 1867 there was a remains of an old bridge which crossed the Grande Ronde River near where the river enters the canyon between Imbler and Elgin. No one seems to know who built this bridge but it evidently filled one of the early needs for more rapid communication.

Thus began the history of Union County.

## Chapter IV

# *First Settlements*

For about two decades after the first wagon trains toiled across the Oregon Trail, the Grande Ronde Valley was regarded by the emigrants as a fine place to stop and rest, as a beauty spot, and by some at least as a potential site for homes and farms. But the emigrants had their sights set on the Willamette Valley, which they regarded as the true Oregon country, and rolled on across the Blue Mountains and the plains of the Columbia to their chosen goal.

Then in the year 1861 there was suddenly a sort of unanimous feeling that the Grande Ronde was ready for settlement, and since in that and the following years there was a great increase in the number of emigrants, settlement was rapid. It is not known for certain just where the very first settler—white settler—built in the valley. It is said that there was a cabin on Catherine Creek, built by Conrad Miller, which may have preceded the building of the Brown house. All that is known for certain is that in 1862 Miller, who had been for an uncertain length of time living in a cabin about where West Union now is, left for Vancouver to secure a stock of fruit trees, stock and implements, and returned in the fall of 1862 to find his claim “jumped”. However, when he told his story to the new claimants, they relinquished the land and Miller began one of the first nurseries in Eastern Oregon, mostly apples. Many orchards around Union began with trees bought from Miller for a dollar a tree. It is said that there are certain references, not now to be found, in old letters and diaries, to a little spot of garden vegetables discovered by emigrants in

a site along Catherine Creek prior to 1861, but this cannot be verified.

It is certain, however, that in the fall of 1862 a number of settlers built log cabins in the Union area and this little community grew into the present town of Union. By the summer of 1863 land was claimed as far west as Craig mountain, or what is now Union Junction, and to the east as far as the mouth of Pyles Canyon.

In September, 1861, a family of emigrants from Iowa named Leasey came into the valley, and finding it a paradise of grass, stayed for a couple of



#### FIRST SETTLEMENT

The first home in Union County taken up by Henry W. Leasey on Black Hawk Trail, now owned by Mrs. Ruth Hughes.

weeks. Their campsite was near the river, and probably about where La Grande is now located. Here they met some Indians who had come across the mountains to harvest the camas root which grew in great abundance on the watery flats of the valley. After

this short period of recuperation, the Leasey wagon began its journey toward the Willamette valley. While struggling up the hill on the old emigrant road back of La Grande they met three travelers bound for the Grande Ronde, and this meeting changed the plans of the Leasey family. The three men, Daniel Chaplain, Green Arnold and Charles Fox, carried supplies from the government post at Umatilla, and expected to sell at least some of these supplies to the emigrant trains they expected to meet. They planned to establish a permanent settlement in the Grande Ronde, and urged Leasey to do so also. The season was late, the distance to the Willamette still great, and the Leasey horses were tired, so it was not hard to persuade Mr. Leasey to return to the Valley.

About the same time, or perhaps earlier in 1861, Benjamin Brown, a native of England, came into the valley from Umatilla in search of a location. Mr. Brown had first settled in Michigan after his arrival in the United States in 1857. He left Michigan and went gold hunting in California in 1859, then later moved to British Columbia where he mined for a time. In 1860 he returned to Michigan for his family, and crossed the plain to Umatilla. There he engaged in freighting from The Dalles to Walla Walla and the Umatilla Agency, while Mrs. Brown cooked for the officers of the agency.

That was an election year, and when the Democratic administration at the Agency learned of the election of Lincoln, they all resigned. Mr. Brown decided to leave the Umatilla region and find a new home. First he made an exploratory journey to the Grande Ronde in the company of William McCauley, Jake Reeth, William Marks and Job Fisher. After a brief examination of the west side of the Valley, they selected a spot in the bend of a little stream

which comes down the mountainside as one travels down the hill on the market road from La Grande into the Mount Glen district. The place was about two hundred yards to the west of the present road. A tablet on the roadside marks the approximate site.

The Leasey family remained in the valley. Mr. Brown and his companions brought their assets from Umatilla Landing into the Grande Ronde, and five log houses were built at the colony site in Mount Glen. As nearly as can be determined, the members of that first community were Benjamin and Frances Brown and their daughters Ada and Esther; Henry W. and Emily Leasey and their children Caroline, Will, John, Columbus, Joseph and James; and Richard Marks, William Marks, William Chaffin, Job Fisher, S. M. Black, E. C. Crane, R. Alexander, and William McCauley. The great mountain which dominates the north end of the valley was named for Mrs. Emily Leasey.

There were many inconveniences, that first winter, but from letters and diaries and reminiscences which have been preserved, it would appear that there was no great hardship, although 1861-62 was one of the longest, coldest and snowiest winters on record in the valley. The Marks boys had a whipsaw with which they made boards for doors for all the cabins. An outdoor baking oven was constructed within the enclosure made by the five cabins, and here a great deal of baking was done, especially by the bachelor members, on a community plan.

There was a fair supply of fresh beef, and undoubtedly plenty of fish in the river when it was not frozen over. Not much mention is made of game, but venison must have been available when the weather permitted hunting. Benjamin Brown's Diary usually

states that the "boys got nothing". The river was very high all winter and spring, and during the winter the settlers found that they had not picked the best location. They determined to move across the river to the place where the emigrant trail crossed the valley and in December commenced cutting logs for building on the site of the claim of one Coffin, in what was later called Old Town.

This Mr. Coffin had come into the valley about October, 1861, and tried to organize a joint-stock company to operate a sawmill, and had taken up land at the mouth of Mill Creek, where later a flour mill was built. However, he soon left the valley, and when he returned, built a mill at Oro Dell.

Before moving from Mount Glen, however, the little group engaged in a number of activities, both social and domestic. They held debates in the long winter evenings, some topics mentioned by Mr. Brown being "Which has the best right to this country, Indians or white men?", "Which causes the most misery, war or intemperance?", and "Which is the strongest passion, love or hate?"

During that first winter, Dick Marks made two violins. The tops and backs were made of pine and the side walls from alder wood. Strings were made of beef sinews, the bows of Indian arrow wood, and the hair for the bows was secured from horse's tails. Glue to put the instruments together was manufactured from beef hoofs. Although undoubtedly not of the finest tone, the music from these home-made instruments must have sounded very sweet to the little group in what Mr. Brown termed "this remote valley".

Throughout the Brown diary, which covers only

the winter of 1861-62, are references to the entertainment these hardy people furnished for themselves. "Had quite a jollyfication after getting all our provisions home (from a trip over the mountains to the



#### **EARLY SETTLERS**

Back row — Alma Brown Conley, Hester Brown Ellsworth, Carry Brown Garity and Ada Brown Waters. Front row — Mr. and Mrs. Brown and single daughter Fanny.

agency)," and "We had quite a time tonight, singing and dancing," "We had dancing and singing tonight and finished with an Indian War Dance," and on December 25th, 1861: "We had a good substantial dinner, everybody well satisfied, had a ball tonight which lasted until 3 o'clock in the morning." They had a New Year's Eve dance which lasted until morning, and Mr. Brown adds that "the ball broke up on account of the fiddler giving out or it would have been going yet."

There was no government in the valley, and when there was domestic trouble among the settlers, Mr. Brown was appointed to serve as Judge

over a sort of divorce case. The diary gives quite a little detail of the troubles of this particular family, with touches of humor. Mr. Black — who later became the first county clerk of Union County — also assumed sufficient authority to perform a marriage ceremony for Caroline Leasey and W. Marks, and at the wedding, Mr. Brown remarks, "some of the boys got a little tight".

There were gold miners going through the valley continually on their way to the gold deposits just discovered in Baker County, and it would appear that there was by this time quite a lot of travel through the valley by emigrants and others. By the time the Browns were settled in their new home south of the river, Mrs. Brown found herself cooking for travelers, and for a time the Browns conducted a sort of inn on the trail. Their home was at Cedar and B Streets in La Grande, on the site where later the L. H. Russell home, known as the "Old Court House," was erected.

By the first of the year 1862, there were in the valley, according to Mr. Brown, thirty-five whites and one half-breed. Mr. Brown's house was the first home actually erected in present La Grande, and his wife, Frances Brown, was the first white woman to have her own home in La Grande proper. The Leaseys eventually took up a homestead near Oro Dell, near the little spring on the present county fair grounds, and this was the first homestead to be patented in the county. The Union County Historical Society has erected a granite stone to mark this location.

Many of Mr. and Mrs. Brown's descendants, to the fourth and fifth generation, still reside in the Valley. For many years a very active women's organization, known as the "Frances Brown Auxiliary

to the Sons and Daughters of Union County Pioneers," has honored and perpetuated the names of the first settlers in our lovely valley.

## Chapter V

# *Covered Wagon Days*

Because of a lack of any other means of transportation early settlers of Union County, like other localities in the West, were compelled to move in by wagon trains from the eastern states. It was a hazardous, all-summer-long trip. If winter overtook the traveler, he would perish in the snow. One must face cold, heat, sand storms, hail storms, mud, rough trails, rivers, mosquitoes, rattle snakes, cactus thorns, dry camps, shortage of grass, possible sickness,



### **DESCENDING THE GRANDE RONDE FOOT OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS**

Wagon train entering Grande Ronde Valley by Ladd Canyon route as seen by early day artist. Copyright picture reproduced for this Union County History by special permission of the Arthur H. Clark Company from "The March of the Mounted Riflemen," first United States Military Expedition to travel the full length of the Oregon Trail from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Vancouver, May to October, 1849, as recorded in the journals of Major Osborne Cross and George Gibbs."

loss of stock and equipment and many other hazards. Besides all of these obstacles, Indians were unpredictable and often robbed and killed the travelers.

This great immigrant battle for the possession of the west has been glamorized in song and story and on TV; yet it is so close and vital to us that we feel that the reader would enjoy some true stories of things that actually happened to residents of Union County as they moved in. This chapter will relate a variety of happenings that we hope will help form a realistic idea of the old Wagon Train Days.

### The Yount Train:

*(The following account is a condensed version of the record compiled by Rebecca Williamson Davis.)*

One of the first wagon trains to bring permanent settlers to the Grande Ronde Valley was the Yount Train (pronounced Yunt). This was a combination of two smaller trains, one from Kansas and Nebraska and the other from Missouri. The first group was heading for the Willamette Valley. Most of the Missouri folk stayed in the Grande Ronde.

Some of these were: Harvey McAlisters, Joseph Goodman, Seth Gerkin, a bachelor, Thomas Elledge families, Thomas Williamsons, and a number of single men.

Tom Williamson had been to California during the gold rush days and was eager to go back there. He had left his wife, Susannah, in Philadelphia while gone before. She refused to be left behind again. Tom did not want to risk taking his family over the route he had gone to California. In a few years the great migration to the West started. Every one

caught the fever of crossing the plains to Oregon. After months of preparation the group left May 5, 1862, with 22 wagons.



**GEORGE GEKELER**

**MRS. GEORGE GEKELER**

Came to the Grande Ronde Valley on Yount Wagon Train in 1862

Eight year old Jim McAlister's description: "We were getting ready all winter. Everyone was busy gathering supplies, deciding what we could take and what would have to be sold. When we finally got started, the women shed a lot of tears and some folks went a piece with us. Aunt Dee went a day's journey with us. She and mother sat in the wagon and talked and cried all day. I couldn't see why. I thought they should be excited like I was, going on so great an adventure."

Harvey McAlister was elected Captain. When they reached Twin Springs, Nebraska Territory, on the North Platte River, the Federal Military outpost refused to let them go on with such a small number of people. Within a few hours the Nebraska train came and the combined group went on. The Nebraska Captain, Joseph Yount, was a veteran of the border patrol during the War with Mexico and he was familiar with the trail as far as the Rocky Moun-

tains. He was elected Captain and Harvey McAlister Second Captain in charge of the stock. All of the wagons were drawn by oxen excepting that of Goodman who had mules. The heavier wagons had four oxen. Most families had two wagons.



**THOMAS WILLIAMSON**

**SUSANNAH WILLIAMSON**

Came to the Grande Ronde Valley on Yount Wagon Train in 1862

Yount made some rules which were strictly enforced. No member of the train was to sell knives or fire arms to the Indians. Indians were not to be harmed and were never to be refused food if they asked for it. The wagons were to be formed in a circle each evening with the front of the wagon to the inside of the circle. After the livestock were grazed they were brought inside for the night. Always a certain number of men stood guard. The next morning the wagon which was the last in the line the day before moved up to first place. No partiality was ever shown. As a result, there was never any trouble in the train.

They had a great deal of difficulty crossing the Platte and Green Rivers. The Platte was a mile wide

and full of quick sand, but shallow enough to ford. It took three days to cross it. The Green was in flood, deep and swift. They calked two wagon boxes and ferried across, swimming all of the livestock.

On the Sweetwater they had a bad scare. Scouts reported Indians in war paint approaching beyond a hill about a mile away. There was great excitement. Wagons were circled, children and stock rounded up. When the Indians rode into sight without yelling or charging, Yount, McAlister and Williamson rode out to meet them. They were looking for another group of Indians that they were at war with. People in the train were so frightened and upset that the train stayed in camp for the rest of the day.

Jim McAlister's version of the above: "We got awful scared. Scouts came galloping in yelling 'Indians in war paint'. My, what a commotion set in . . . There were some rock bluffs about a hundred yards away . . . I ran with my bow and arrows and hid in these rocks expecting to see a real massacre . . . would hide until another train came along . . . would be a hero. Was sort of deflated when there was no fight. As painted Indians went by, I said, 'Oh shucks' and let go with an arrow in their direction . . . Indian saw me, rode over, got off, drug me down. He had a big knife, got me by the hair and tipped my head foreward and run the knife along the back of my head. Scared speechless, I knew I would be scalped. He let go, paddled me with one of his arrows, pushed me toward camp. As I ran like a scared rabbit he had a big laugh. I never shot at any more Indians."

They spent the fourth of July at Fort Laramie. Some one tied a flag in the top of a cottonwood tree, and they had the usual speeches, athletic contests,

special dinner, etc. There were a few southern sympathizers who did not take part.



**REBECCA McALLISTER**

Came to Grande Ronde Valley on Yount Wagon Train in 1862.

In the mountain country, they came to a stream that was deep and swift, with banks so steep they could not get across. Logs had to be cut for a bridge. Women did the washing while they waited; they camped in a patch of blue berries.

From their appearance these berries were pronounced poison. Everyone was starved for fruit. All precautions were taken that the children did not eat these poison berries. The boy Jim, off by himself, used pioneer methods he had been taught. He hid and watched the birds and animals. He saw several birds eat the berries and then a squirrel. He ate some and they were delicious. He told some of the children that he had eaten them and they did not hurt him, and they ate some too. When the older folks found out, they were beside themselves with fright; and doctored the youngsters for poison. Jim finally got the fact across that he had eaten a lot of

them the day before; they were good and had not hurt him a bit; he had waited till he saw birds and a squirrel eat them.

When none of the children got sick, the grown folks ate some; even made Poison berry cobbler. Afterwards they always watched for Poison berries and enjoyed them.

In a rocky pass 12 miles west of American Falls they came upon a place where the Shoshone Indians had ambushed a train and killed all the people two days before. A train ahead of the Yount train had buried all of the dead, but two they did not find. The Yount train buried these August 12th.

The train kept on the south side of the Snake River. Where they crossed the Owyhee, some of the children were bitten by scorpions. They were terribly sick, but none died. Near Huntington the oxen ate larkspur and several died. Milk cows took their place.

The train came down the old immigrant trail between Hot Lake and Ladd Canyon, followed the foot hill to the tiny settlement of La Grande. "Bud" McAlister and Joe Williamson went on to The Dalles for supplies. Later two wagons were sent to Walla Walla to buy seed grain and potatoes. George Gekeler, who was out of funds, borrowed money and went to Umatilla Landing and bought a load of flour and peddled it as far as Silver City, Idaho. He sold out and got back in November. All of the shelter they had until spring was a tent made of bed sheets in the tall rye grass.

In various ways these families all got established.

The next summer neighbors were going huckleberrying in the hills back of La Grande. Some of the children of the Yount Train, not being able to go, followed behind and went into the timber above where the Odd Fellows Cemetery now is. Here they were elated to find Poison Berries and came home with the good news and a sample of the berries. Older residents informed them they had just plain old huckleberries.



#### **THE NEW and OLD HOMES OF HARVEY McALISTER**

Pictured at the left is the new home of Harvey McAlister, and at the right, the old original log cabin.

#### **The E. S. McComas Journal**

An estimated 1,300 wagons and 8,000 people traveled the Old Oregon Trail during the summer of 1862. Among them was a young Iowa man, E. S. McComas, a southern sympathizer who decided to go west and make his fortune in the gold mines and return after the war. He did go to the mines and he

did continue to be interested in mining, but he never made a fortune or returned to Iowa. He soon landed in Union County where he made his home for about 50 years, engaged in many enterprises. He was elected County Clerk in 1866 and started three early newspapers in the county.

McComas kept a day to day journal, which was published and copyrighted as a Journal of Travel by the Champoeg Press of Portland, who have given special permission for its use in this publication. Space permits using only the record of a few days:

"May 14th, 1862. Bid friends adieu and started. Traveled to Byington Creek and encamped for the first night.

"May 15. Neil took an overdose of eggs here; also had indications of a hard storm but we prepared for it, and after some hard wind and thunder it passed over. Roads very bad.

"May 18th. Rain all day, roads bad . . . rain all night . . . Westfall and Luther still unwell . . . horses loose. When I went to catch them I undertook to catch Paddy. He throwed me into a buyo and run over me and throwed me clear under and hurt my leg.

"Sund. 25. Crossed Middle River a very small stream. Today we crossed the great Western Divide which separates the waters of the Mississippi and Missouri. Drove 18 miles and camped on Turkey Creek. Layed by till Monday. Luther baked bread.

"Mond. 26. . . . Had one of the hardest storms I ever saw. Got our things above deck all wet, had to sleep with wet clothes till morning.

"June 20th. . . . Drove 13 m. over sand hills, had a very hard day on our team. At night had a regular nor-West thunder storm. Westfall's horse was sick tonight.

"21st. Drove 10 m. to Rattlesnake River. Dinner. Come to a bad slough and swamped all four of our horses down. Had to unload our things. Dr. Jones broke his wagon tongue. No wood now for 80 miles back none before us for 150 miles; use buffalo chips Platte Valley coal.

"July 2d. . . . Drove 8 miles and came down a very bad hill. Let our wagon down with ropes.

"3d. Drove 16 m. over bad roads in the Black Hills.

"10th. . . . Came 10 m. and stopped where the mosquitoes were thicker than any person who had never been west of Omaha could imagine.

"Sunday 13th. Eventful day . . . Came to Independence Rock 14 m. Went over the rock and read names and wrote mine . . . It contains the names of thousands of travelers and gold hunters.

"17th. Come in sight of first snow on the mountains. Passed Ice Springs. Had cold rain and hail . . . nearly froze with our overcoats on.

"21st. Come to Sweet Water. Had an introduction to Old Bridger. He gave us a description of the road to Ft. Hall via of Lander's Cut off . . . I went hunting and got sick.

"24th. . . . We left Old John, George Walker's

horse, to die of rattlesnake bite. It was like leaving a friend tried and true.

"30th. . . . passed grave of man murdered by Indians and buried by train ahead.

"July 31. . . . It was cold enough last night to freeze ice strong enough to bear the weight of a man. Had no grass till tonight of any account for 3 days.

"Aug. 3d. We will now cook our grub with nothing but a frying pan, will cook more than we will have to cook in it soon and then we can throw that away.

"8th. (They took in and cared for 12 men who had fought Indians. Some were badly wounded.)

"17th. . . . (They had been having continuous Indian trouble) . . . This road seems to be a continual battle ground. We look for them every minute.

"27th. Had to make another long drive of 18 miles without water down to where we would again strike Snake River over such roads as are not to be found in any other country only this. Hot and so dusty that a driver could not see his oxen . . .

"Sept. 5. Started from Castle Creek drove 7 miles to Burnt Rock Creek. Here had no grass at all. Here we rested and watered our cattle and prospected for gold. Here we had to climb the worst hill on the Oregon road. Doubled teams and got up by four o'clock. Had then to go 18 m. for grass and water.

"8th. . . . The country all the way down the

Snake River is one of the most desolate and dreary wastes in the world. Light soft ground with no soil on top, looking like an ash heap, dust six inches deep and as light as flour. When a man travels all day in it he looks like a miller. You can see nothing but his eyes and them look red. The dust is here so light that it sometimes raises 300 feet above the train. The ground is covered with two of the most detestable shrubs that grows, grees wood and wild sage. The whole face of the country shows that it has at some time been burned to cinders.

"10th. Drove 5 m. down the river, then left the Snake River and came 10 m. across the Owyhee River. Crossed this and then layed by to kill a beef. Here one of the boys went back to get an ox that had been left and found it shot and its throat cut by the Indians. He started back and an Indian shot at him which hurried him in to camp.

"11th. . . . This afternoon we met two men carrying the express to the soldiers at Catherine Creek and got from them the first news in regard to the war in the States . . .

"12th. Crossed the Malheur and come 7 miles through an alkali valley which might properly be termed Carron Valley for the great number of dead cattle which are here. Came in the afternoon 9 m. to a spring. This afternoon it clouded up and the wind commenced blowing, and turned cold. It looks like freezing to death, now slightly like starving to death, very much like being blown away in a hurricane, and a good prospect of being killed by Indians...

"13th. . . . Today I counted 27 head of dead cattle laying along the road.

"Sunday 14th. We are just four months from home today . . . We drove 5 m. to Burnt River and camped in the long dreaded Burnt River canyon near a pile of sculls of a train that were massacred in '52 here . . . our Captain resigned and we are now going it every fellow for himself. I traded my shot gun for a double barrelled rifle.

"16th. All got up this morning with our hair on and nothing wrong. Started up Burnt River canyon . . . have been entering a more fertile country than we have been in during our forty years pilgrimage in the wilderness. The sage brush is beginning to run out, grees wood is getting scarce and in places we find large meadows of wild rye. Everybody are in a hurry but us. We pass and repass small trains of five or six wagons. Some call themselves Wild Cats some the Pole Cats. We are the Cata-mounts, some the Tom Cats and all such names the boys of different trains give each other. Thirty miles more will take us to the new mines on Powder River to the new miners town of Auburn, our present destination. No doubt some of us would like to see a house once more, it would indeed look like home. Home — I wonder how far it is from here. It would take a bigger head than mine to run back over all the road and recollect it.

"19th. Came to Auburn. Found it a town of about 200 houses. Saw a man hung, miners at work."

(22d to 28th — building log cabin.)

"28th. Started for The Dalles 250 miles, with a wagon and three yoke of oxen to get provisions for winter . . .

"29th. Drove 20 m. to Grande Ronde Valley . . .

Come down a hill two miles long and 10 steep in Gr. Ronde.

"November 11th. Got to Auburn . . . The town which started early in the spring now contains as many as 1000 houses and some 60 stores. A Spaniard killed two men with a knife. The miners took him and drug him down town by the heels and then hung him. A greaser shot into the crowd and wounded 3 men. The miners shot him. We have traded for the one half of two claims on Freeze Out Gulch and now are working them."

(For lack of space we skip interesting happenings at Auburn.)

"May 4th, 1863. Started for Eagle River mines . . .

"January 1, 1864. . . . This new year finds me in the flourishing little village of La Grande . . .

"Jan. 23rd. This is my birthday. I am 25 years old today. Older in fact than I ever was before. I celebrated my 25th birthday by working on the stable.

"April 11th. Commenced clerking for Mr. Andrews at 60 dollars for the first month . . . "

*(The McComas Journal records happenings of the days up into 1867. He continued to make Union County his home).*

### The Woodell Trek Across The Plains:

*(Quotations from the complete story).*

On April 9, 1862, the start was made. This was the day before Fort Sumpter had been fired upon, but

Iowa was a long way from Washington then, and our travelers did not know it until they reached Council Bluffs, many miles on their way.

Can you see them in your mind? The light spring wagon took the lead, double decked it was, with the lower part filled with provisions: barrels of flour and sugar, sides and sides of bacon, grain and corn for seed, a few cherished flower seeds. The upper deck was crowded to the bursting point with bedding and other equipment — large curving bows covered with gleaming white canvas, pulled by a grey and a bay mare, stepping so lively, and on the seat were the young men, the moving spirits of this great adventure. Bill was just past 21 and Joe, 19. Their guns were by their sides for they were to be the hunters of the party and many a deer, bear, antelope and buffalo, to say nothing of birds, they brought into camp on that long trail.

Just behind them the stolid ox-team stood ready to move, six big yoke of oxen in the wheel and in the lead four milk cows. Father Woodell stood beside the wheel oxen, his long whip in his hand, and at the head stood his son-in-law, John Wallsinger. Each found, by necessity, his work outlined for him. A tall, slim young man with a keen sense of direction, a tireless walker, John soon became the scout of the party, walking long miles ahead of the slow moving oxen, scouting out camping places, for a creek must be found for a night camp; the noon one was so often a dry one. The second wagon, like the other, was filled to the brim, but on the upper deck one bed was left unrolled and the tent was always put in the easiest place to get at for there were children in the wagon.

Eliza Woodell Wallsinger sat on the high seat with

her three weeks old baby, Sallie, and four year old Maggie in a bright calico sunbonnet bobbing around on the seat beside her. The little Woodell brothers, Junius (or Doon as he was called), 9, and James, 13, hanging to the back of the wagon ready to climb aboard when the slow moving oxen got in motion.

(Neighbors and friends were on hand for a tearful farewell).

The first few stops were a picnic . . .

At Council Bluffs six or seven more wagons joined the party . . . (Jimmy was reprimanded for picking on his brother and he started back for Iowa. His father followed with a sagebrush switch, and after a merry chase returned with him).

As they neared Devil's Gap on the Sweetwater in Western Nebraska, they met with a number of other wagons headed west. (Mosquitoes tormented them at this camp). Not the little annoying Iowa kind, but the great big blood-thirsty western kind.

Among the folks who joined the train at Devil's Gap was the Hasty family. They had a blind boy named Ephraim, a year younger than Jimmy. (Jimmy and Eph became great pals for the rest of the journey).

(In July at Green River, Wyoming, crossing the swollen stream was an exciting adventure. Here they learned that 9 wagons ten miles ahead had just been ambushed by Indians, one man killed and stock stolen. Great precaution was taken, the unfortunate people and salvageable equipment was taken into the train. Only one volley of rifle fire was exchanged with the Indians who were frightened away).

One hot afternoon, thunder clouds hung low in the west; toward evening, heavy thunder and lightning came, crash after crash. Captain Manville called a halt, but the storm was too swift for them. Before the oxen could be unyoked it struck, and oh, what a hail storm; hail stones as big as hen eggs, great jagged pieces of ice that cut the horses. They snorted and broke loose from the wagons. Oxen belled and dragged their yokes, dashing away across the rolling plain. Liza with the help of Jimmy was trying to pitch the tent, when the wind caught it and tore it out of her hands. Grabbing the baby and little Maggie, one in each arm, she threw a quilt over them and dived under the wagon. All of the next day was spent in gathering up the stock and mending the equipment.

It was August now. One monotonous day followed another — dust and heat, sage-brush and sand across Nevada and Idaho. Traveling in the dust behind the wagons, Jimmy said to little Eph, "How I hate the sage-brush; all you can see, all you can smell, all you can taste, is sage-brush. Wish I was back 'home.'"

(The next day Jimmy did not come for Eph. Eph felt his way along the Woodell wagon and asked Mrs. Wallsinger about him. He was sick with a fever. He tossed in his bed in the wagon and was nursed with cold packs at night. A Mrs. McCormick took charge of the nursing. He was dangerously ill. Captain Manville, under protest from travelers anxious to reach the Willamette Valley, ordered the train halted at Fort Hall. The fever broke and train again moved. Within a few days he was again able to walk and lead Eph by the hand.

(In September, when they looked from Ladd Can-

yon Hill across the Grande Ronde Valley with its big waving grass, father Woodell said, "Here I think I'll want to stay." The grown boys wished to go on, but finally agreed to stay for the winter. They found a good spring on the west side of the valley and built a log cabin while the big boys went to The Dalles and Walla Walla for supplies. Like many other settlers, when spring came, they no longer were interested in going on.

How different were the looks of the party camped on the banks of the Grande Ronde, from that party which six months before had left Blandensburg, Iowa. The wagons were dust-stained and old. The once gleaming white canvas covers were tattered and torn. Maggie's little pink calico sunbonnet, a dingy rag, flapped from one of the wagon bows. But the little three weeks old baby whom all of the Blandensburg folks said Liza would never bring to their destination alive — that same little baby — was so fat and brown, you could almost take her for an Indian papoose. Just remember, four milk cows were in the lead of that second wagon.

### The Dunham Wright Story:

(We offer here just a few quotations from an unpublished book "One Century of Life", the story of Dunham Wright, "The Sage of Medical Springs", compiled and edited by his daughter Grace Powers and Frank Jasper.)

In the spring of 1862, Wright left the mining village of Denver for the mines of Eastern Oregon and Idaho with a 300 wagon emigrant train.

After crossing the continental divide they decid-

ed to save a few hundred miles by taking a cut off route to Green River. It was desert country. They traveled all night and all day without water) "Our cattle got so tired and worn out that it was all that we could do to keep them from lying down. Their hair stood up on their backs like porkeypine quills . . . came up a north wind . . . cattle evidently smelled the water. It took every available man to keep them from stampeding . . .

"We uncoupled them . . . In less than half an hour there must have been 500 animals floating around in the river and drinking."

(After much deliberation they decided to attempt a crossing of the flooded river, calked up wagon beds and started).

"We swam the cattle across the best we could, and some of them had to be pulled behind the wagons, because they wouldn't swim . . . It was hard work to pull them . . . Finally a young fellow said 'Damn you, I'll drown you.'

"He took hold of an old cow's horns and put her head under . . . She came up . . . swam and pushed against the wagon . . . other cows were given the same treatment and reacted the same way.

"It took ten days to cross . . . had an army of people on one side taking wagons apart, another on the other side putting them back together . . . "

(At another stream, Ham's Fork, they found deep and swift water some 30 feet wide between high banks. They took the whole train across with tow ropes. It took nearly 20 days.)

(They reached the Snake River 10 miles above Fort Hall. The ferry could haul but one wagon at a time. Hundreds of others had flocked there to get to the mines, and they were ten days crossing).

"After we crossed Snake River, an even more difficult task confronted us. We were compelled to make our road as we went and much of it was through the lava beds. There was hardly room between the cliffs of lava for us to throw out the rocks and make a passage for the wagons, and besides we had to cut down some of the trees to make our road. Our train was so large that when we would start out with the first wagon at four in the morning, it would be nine o'clock before the last wagon would leave. Besides our trouble with the roads we were all the time in fear lest the Indians would attack us. Following the massacre of 1852, the Indians had decreed that no emigrant train should go north of the Snake River . . . The red skins put on their war paint and were ready to fall upon us if a favorable opportunity presented itself, but we were a large number and we organized our crew well for defense. We placed a guard in front, and one on each side and one in the rear of our train, so the Indians were afraid to molest us.

. . . "intersected the original Oregon Trail at the exact spot where the great massacre was perpetrated in 1852. The old trail had not been traveled for ten years. It was some 50 yards in width and covered with weeds and grasses. We stopped at the massacre ground for about 45 minutes. A grim sight was before us. There in the rye grass were irons and debris lying in a circular position just as the corral had been formed at the time the Indians rushed upon that train many years before. Bones lay everywhere. Those of humans and animals alike were scattered in the grass. I saw as many as twenty human skulls

in one place. I was only about twenty years old then, but the thought came to me, what a place of anguish and human suffering this spot has been."

### The H. W. Oliver Story:

(Told by his son, Jack Oliver, of La Grande, January 9, 1941).

"When a child, I came west with my parents in a 40 wagon train. We left Iowa in May and arrived here October 10, 1864. John McKinnis drove one of our wagons and afterward worked in father's saw mill which he had built north of Summerville in 1865. The John Van Blokland family also came in this train.

"We had trouble with the Indians one time on the Platte River. The guard had come in one morning from the horses and my father became anxious about them. He started out immediately but some Indians cut in between him and the horses and the camp. Father got close enough to shoot at them with his six shooter and hit an Indian or a horse, causing them to turn away, but not before they got part of our horses.

Some of the boys went to a nearby fort, but were told that they had too few soldiers to engage the Indians. A few soldiers came back to look over the situation. As they appeared in the distance, some of our boys thought that the Indians were coming on horse back and ran away on their horses. The soldiers thought they were chasing some outlaws and did considerable shooting at them as they swam the Platte, killing one of father's horses from under its rider. The boys hid and slipped down the opposite side of the river and hailed the soldiers. Everything

was all right and we went on our way as soon as we could reorganize our teams to compensate for our loss of stock.

"Barely enough stock was left to move with. The Van Blokland family made the trip on to Union county with just one ox and one mule to pull their wagon."

### Mr. and Mrs. Avery Harrison:

The parents of Mr. and Mrs. Avery Harrison were members of four families who came across the plains to Oregon in 1865, settled in the Grande Ronde Valley and became builders of the new country.

Mr. Harrison's father, Mansfield A. Harrison, and Mrs. Pearl (Hunter) Harrison's father, Wm. Gay Hunter, were young men when they left for the Willamette Valley of Oregon with a wagon train under Captain John Hunter on August 21, 1865. Also in this train was another future resident of Union county, Al Good.

In fitting up the wagons provision was made to ration supplies in a manner used by other emigrants. Supplies for the last half of the journey were placed in the bottom of the wagon bed and then a floor laid over them. Provisions for the first half of the trip were stored above this second floor, which would not be removed until the half way point was reached on the trip.

At the Platte River a day was spent in crossing and the stock was turned loose on an island to rest and graze. Stock had to swim. Women rode in wagons which had water tight beds, but most of the men swam by holding onto the tail of an animal, which

required caution not to get too close to the critter which was towing by the tail, lest the man be kicked.

It was not wise to kill buffalo to add to the scanty supply of provisions, because the Indians were resentful of their buffalo being killed by the immigrants, and retaliated by killing the offenders. Consequently, other kinds of game were sought.

Many of the travelers were from level country and it took time for them to get used to men hanging on the upper side of a wagon to keep it from overturning on a sideling place, helping up or down steep hills and dragging young trees down steep hills to hold the wagon back. Children took their place at the routine task of gathering buffalo chips for camp fires.

At the Snake River this late in the fall the water was low enough, where they crossed, that men could wade across on the riffles.

When the train entered the Grande Ronde Valley by the road just east of Ladd Canyon, it was November and there was snow on the ground. Grass in the valley was so big that the weary travelers decided to stay. They went around the foot hills rather than cross the valley floor. Harrison stayed in old La Grande, did carpenter work, taught school, was justice of peace at Island City for thirty-two years and county judge from 1902-1906.

Hunter went on north to the Mt. Glen area, where Ben Brown had spent the winter of 1861-62, and homesteaded. He also freighted from Umatilla Landing to Boise.

Mrs. Avery Harrison's mother, Eliza Mitchel, came across the plains with her parents in 1865, when

she was 14 years old. This train started in June and arrived in October. Eliza's father, Moses Hawk Mitchel, was captain of the train. Eliza drove a wagon drawn by four oxen for much of the journey, until one ox died. Mr. Mitchel sold another ox and put two horses and two oxen on the wagon. This made a combination that the 14 year old girl could not handle and her father had to make other arrangements.

The Mitchels located at Mt. Glen. That winter their cabin snowed so nearly under that they had to go in and out of a window, which was made of oiled paper, and keep a flag at the spring so they could find where to dig for water.

Avery Harrison's mother, Harriett Jane Buchanan, came across the plains in 1865, with her father, Wm. D. Buchanan. They arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley in September and settled on what is now the A. W. Hasse place on Gekeler Lane.

Authorities insisted that a large number of wagons travel in a train for protection across the great uninhabited distance to Oregon. Besides the travelers there were occasional groups of soldiers and an occasional lone man. As the Buchanan's train journeyed from Iowa to Oregon, far, far from any settlement, Harriett long remembered how thrilled they were to see a lone squatter's cabin back a way from their route. They went to see this reminder of far away civilization. On reaching the cabin they discovered a scalped man hanging in it, and they were more anxious to get away and forget it.

### Joseph Harris:

As soon as he was released from the army after

the Civil War, Joseph Harris and his neighbors commenced preparing to leave to cross the plains to seek a home in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, "the place where the big red apples grow". In the Spring of 1865, they left their Missouri home with few farewells, because all of the family and relatives were also going.



**JOSEPH and MARY HARRIS**

Joseph Harris and Mary Ann (Sturgill) Harris had six grown children, 5 girls and a boy. Their daughter, Priscilla, had married Andrew Knight and they had a small girl and a baby, Bill, born that February. The daughter, Rebecca, had married Ned Morelock and was pregnant. The other four children married and raised families after reaching Union County, Oregon.

The wagon train, under the leadership of Captain Joe Knight, encountered the usual hardships. One constant problem was a shortage of grass for their 100 wagon train where previous trains had gone. However, the large number of extremely well armed men

in the group may have been the reason that Indians never molested them.

One day Mrs. Harris sat in the back of her wagon churning some cream in a small hand churn. The cattle became frightened and stampeded. Eventually the riders got them headed off and quieted. When she gathered up the remains of her churning, she found that the jolting of the wagon had completed her task. She had butter.

Later in northeastern Utah their stock was stampeded by renegades dressed in bear skins, probably hoping to steal some of the frightened cattle. This stampede was disastrous. Wagons and equipment were broken, stock was killed and lost, people were injured. They lost two weeks of valuable summer weather repairing equipment to continue their journey. One lady had a broken leg. As no doctor was available, Captain Knight set the bone, splinted it and built a hammock across the top of a wagon bed on which she rode. She recovered in fine shape.

After this stampede work stock was very scarce. A two year old heifer carried one end of the yoke on the Harris wagon from Utah to Oregon. In 1867, when the daughter, Catherine, married John McKinnis of Summerville, Oregon, Harris gave the young folks this cow as a wedding present, and the McKinnis family for many decades traced their cattle back to "Old Roany" who had brought the family to Oregon.

Andrew lost his last oxen on Dead Ox Flat in what is now Malheur County, and cows brought his wagon the rest of the way.

In the fall of 1865, the crippled wagon train toil-

ed from Durkee across the hills to Powder River. After weeks in the hot and dry "Great American Desert" (Snake River Valley), Grande Ronde Valley's evergreen trees were a beauty to behold; the green grass was a heaven for the tired stock. Harris found a green meadow at the foot of a mountain on the east side of the valley. He arranged to spend the winter by the big spring that kept the meadow green. The rest of the family found winter quarters.



#### MT. HARRIS

The big spring by which Joseph Harris found shelter in the fall of 1865 is by buildings pictured here.

Rebecca's child, a daughter Martha, was born in a little log cabin on Indian Creek on January 6, 1866. When spring came, Harris' cattle ranged on the bunch grass of the sunny mountain side and soon grew fat. He lost interest in going on to the Willamette Valley. Before many years he was growing "big red apples" for his family and neighbors and becoming prosperous as a stock man. Neighbors were calling the mountain where his cattle ranged, Harris Mountain. For nearly 50 years he continued to live in Union county.

Bill Knight and Martha Morelock, now Martha Russell, have continued to live in Union County for nearly a century. Martha, quite hale for her age, lives with her daughter, Bethel Barnes, of Elgin. Bill Knight lives with his son, George Knight, of La Grande. Although he will soon be 96 years old, Bill still milks the cows, tends the garden even to driving the tractor, at George's place. He reads without glasses and has a vivid mind and sense of humor. The long ago trip across the plains must have toughened the bodies of these two old residents of Union County.



MARTHA RUSSELL

BILL KNIGHT

Martha (Morelock) Russell was the first white child born in the land of Hunaha, and the oldest native born resident of Union County.

Bill Knight, we believe, is one of the oldest men in Union County and certainly came by wagon train the longest time ago. He is proud of his age. Although his hearing is poor, from his actions or conversation, one would easily think him to be in his sixties.

### Peter Nelson:

The Nelsons came to Utah in early days and on to Union County by wagon in 1882. Mrs. Annetta (Johnson) Adskim, granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Nelson states, "A good many times I have asked grandmother about her trip to Oregon in a covered wagon. All of the explanation I ever got was, 'It was awful, just sowbelly and summer complaint'."

### The Hug Family:

(Used by permission from a copyrighted book, "100 Years of Hugs").

(Five grown brothers and one sister of the Hug family crossed the plains to Utah in 1855 and 1860. After some 20 years one by one the six families came by wagon train to Union County. Jacob, John, David, Rudolph and Rachel Hug, in the summer of 1855, were in a wagon train on the prairie, and experienced the following thrill):

"One day we noticed a distant roar coming from across the prairie. Gradually it grew louder. A dark line showed on the horizon. It was moving toward us. It was thousands of buffalo stampeding toward us.

"It was common knowledge that stampeding buffalo would not deviate from their course, but would push each other into any obstruction and even to certain death. What could we do?

"The captain ordered the wagons to be quickly formed into a sharp 'V' with the point toward the oncoming animals, all stock and persons to be inside

the 'V'. The roar grew loud and the ground seemed to tremble from the tread of the vast herd of stubby-necked and short-horned animals that were as large as bulls.

"As the buffalo reached the point of the 'V' all of the rifles in the train concentrated their fire at this point. Animals floundered and the herd deviated enough to go down the sides of the 'V'. Our wagons were like a ship plowing through a stormy sea, while the tempest of destruction passed.

"Only moderate damage was sustained, but, had it not been for quick thinking and quick acting, we would all have been ground to bits and no one would have remained to tell the story."

(Anna Muller, who afterwards married the other Hug brother, dictated her experiences in crossing the plains. We quote from the account of her trip from Omaha to Salt Lake):

"At Omaha we bought wagons and cattle and outfitted for the trip across the plains. A few had no money at all and the rest bought push carts and provisions for them. Six or eight of these were fitted up and started out about two weeks ahead of the wagons . . .

"I had no money, but another girl and I agreed to bake the bread for the train for the privilege of walking along with them. We were usually obliged to gather buffalo chips (dried cow dung) in our aprons for fuel . . . used dutch oven."

(They were badly frightened by Indians, to whom they could not talk. They fed the Indians and made a night march to get away from them.)

"Grass was scarce . . . Cattle got poor and died . . . Supplies were discarded to lighten the loads . . .

"Impure water and alkali water caused dysentery . . . Young sick girls in their modesty trailed behind the train . . . Some of my wagon train friends thus lie in shallow prairie graves . . .

"Before we reached our destination, it was late in the year, and we were encountering snow storms. The three pairs of heavy shoes that I had on the start of the trek were worn out and I was barefoot. With the exception of some flour our food was all gone. All that we had to eat was bread made by mixing flour and water. This 'hardtack' was so hard that we had to boil it in water to eat it. As we neared Salt Lake, we came to some farm houses where we bought some milk. Were we glad!"

(The following quotations relative to the trip of the Henry Hug family from Utah to Oregon by wagon in 1879 are from a story recorded by his son, Walter Fridoline Hug).

"Mother dreaded the trip." (Right after the Chief Joseph and Bannock Wars in Eastern Oregon, Anna Muller Hug vividly remembered her former experiences).

(There were the usual farewells, which all felt would be final until death).

"I was 15 years old and small for my age, but drove one of the wagons . . ."

(Fridoline gives descriptions of a blinding sand storm near Cedar City, Utah . . . watching the building on the Mormon Temple at Salt Lake, which was

about 40 ft. high at that time . . . Thrills of fording the swollen Bear River . . . He tells of the good times they had around the camp fires, playing the banjo and accordion and singing; also of hunting rabbits in the sage brush of Idaho, where irrigated farms are now).

"On the hills between Boise and Payette River we encountered Mormon crickets in great numbers, big dark brown fellows as big as small mice. The road was full of them. Our wagon wheels crushed them continuously. It was a gruesome mess. They were everywhere and in everything.

"On the trip up the Burnt River we were interested in seeing some mining operations being carried on by means of hydraulic nozzles . . . At Durkee there was a hard hail storm . . . hail yet on the ground the next day.

" . . . Entered Grande Ronde Valley by way of Union . . . Got place near Uncle Jacob's place on Pumpkin Ridge . . . Put up 14 x 16 ft. log cabin . . . Our family and Staheli family wintered there . . . Furniture was blocks cut from logs; burned them in fireplace and made new ones from time to time . . . We boys slept in covered wagons that winter . . . Next summer moved to Cricket Flat."

### The Centennial Wagon Train of 1959:

To dramatize the long ago wagon trains that settled the Oregon Country and to pay tribute to these hardy pioneers, the 1959 Wagon Train was made a feature of Oregon's Centennial celebration. Some 30 men, women and children of Oregon went to Independence, Missouri, and made the 2200 mile trip to Independence, Oregon, in seven covered wagons, re-

plicas of those of 100 years before, with horse and mule teams.

They camped out and faced the same rain, heat and summer long trip. Hostile Indians, water and food shortage, and lack of roads were no problem, but traffic hazards and constant throngs of visitors took their place. An estimated 3,000,000 people saw them from April 19, when Ex-President Truman start-



#### CENTENNIAL WAGON TRAIN — 1959

Shows campsite west of La Grande used by Centennial Wagon Train on its trek from Independence, Missouri to Independence, Oregon.

ed them on their way, till the day they reached the border of their home state. On August 15, when they reached the little city of Independence, Oregon, 100,000 people swarmed over the area to celebrate the event.

The night of July 28, this wagon train camped at North Powder; on the 29th they camped at La Grande, and on the 30th, west of La Grande, they of-

ficially opened the first section of four lane highway of the Oregon Trail in the Blue Mountains. Just as wagon trains of old found peace and comfort at the Blue Mountains, that night near the Union - Umatilla county line there was one peaceful camp.

## Chapter VI

# *County Government*

### **Geography:**

A large and productive land known as the Oregon Country was the last part of our continent to be settled by white men. From the Russian outposts in the north and the Spanish settlements in California this country lay between the Pacific Ocean and the rugged barrier of the Rocky Mountains, shut off from travel routes.

In the early 1900's, American and British explorers commenced penetrating this area and gradually men came to make their homes. On June 15, 1846, a peaceful settlement was concluded between Britain and the United States wherein Britain received the land north of parallel 49, (now British Columbia) and the United States that to the south, now comprising Oregon, Washington, Idaho and portions of Montana and Wyoming. Thus this Oregon country has the distinction of being the only part of the United States that has never been under any other flag than the Stars and Stripes.

August 13, 1848, Congress passed a measure establishing the Oregon country as a territory and January 11, 1854, all of the country between the Cascades and the Rocky Mountains was formed into Wasco county, quite a large county. February 14, 1859, Oregon was admitted into the Union with its present boundaries, Wasco county being thereby drastically reduced, but still very large. Due to settlement around the mines of Auburn, Powder River and Baker, on September 22, 1862, Baker County was cut

off Wasco. It included what is now Malheur, Union and Wallowa counties. Settlement of the Grande Ronde Valley led to the establishment of the new county of Union from the North end of Baker County on October 14, 1864. It included what is now Union and Wallowa counties and the northeast part of Baker.

Settlers in the Grande Ronde were about equally divided between sympathizers for the North and South during these dark Civil War days, but by a close vote they named the county Union to signify their support of the cause of the Union.

It was February 11, 1887, before Wallowa County was established, and the following post offices that had been established in Union County were in the new county of Wallowa:

	established
Wallowa .....	April 10, 1873
Prairie Creek .....	January 10, 1876
Alder .....	April 5, 1878
Lostine .....	August 6, 1878
Joseph .....	April 23, 1880
Imnaha .....	January 4, 1885
Arcadia .....	January 8, 1887

A later adjustment of the Union-Wallowa county line to follow the section lines rather than the Minam and Wallowa Rivers, shifted the post office of Minam (established June 25, 1890) from Union to Wallowa County.

In 1901, the territory of Union County was further reduced by the transfer to Baker County of that portion of Union County lying generally between the Powder River, Snake River and the south boundary

of Wallowa County. This area, known as the "Panhandle", contains much timber and mineral land. The transfer was made because its location made it more accessible to Baker. Post officers in this "Panhandle" country were:

	established
Gem .....	August 7, 1871
Sparta .....	October 29, 1872
Prichard .....	December 3, 1874
Pine Valley .....	June 27, 1878
New Bridge .....	July 22, 1878
Keating .....	December 30, 1880
Jamestown .....	June 5, 1881
Cornucopia .....	December 7, 1885
Sanger .....	August 17, 1887
Halfway .....	October 3, 1887
Pine .....	June 1, 1892
Carson .....	July 26, 1893
Eagleton .....	April 22, 1896
Richland .....	September 23, 1897
Copperfield .....	July 22, 1899
Homestead .....	May 12, 1900
Burkmont .....	October 18, 1900
Landing .....	December 22, 1900

On October 14, 1864, when the Governor of Oregon signed the bill creating Union County out of part of Baker County, it contained the provision that La Grande would be the temporary county seat. The first Court House was set up in a building belonging to Green Arnold. Early records show that rent was paid to him for such a purpose.

The first county officials appointed by Governor Gibbs were as follows: Judge, D. W. Lickenthaler; Commissioners, Daniel Payton and Samuel Hannah; Clerk, I. L. Thomas; Sheriff, Isaiah Gear; Treasurer,

D. S. Kinsey; Assessor, J. A. J. Chapman; Superintendent of School, J. R. Ellison.



**FIRST UNION COUNTY COURT HOUSE at B & CEDAR STS.**  
(Picture furnished by Oregon Historical Society)

The first meeting of the county court was a special session which convened on November 4, 1864. The business centered around the appointment of judges for the election to be held that same month. Ten days later at another session the sheriff was directed to make the necessary arrangements for fitting up a building for a Court House; the clerk was authorized to appoint a suitable person to assist the county clerk of Baker County in copying the assessment rolls belonging to Union County; and J. Argersinger was appointed justice of peace for the precinct of Union.

At the first regular session of the county court on December 7, 1864, bills in the amount of \$650 were ordered paid, and the Superintendent of Schools was authorized to sell off a quantity of the school lands at a price of not less than \$4 per acre. Tax millage levies were also established at approximately 30

mills. It is interesting to note that a poll tax of two dollars per person was levied for state and county purposes in addition to the regular property tax. Men liable to military service were levied an additional two dollars of poll tax.

The location of the county seat was a problem which was to plague the citizens of Union county for nearly forty years before it was finally settled after the turn of the twentieth century. On March 6, 1865, there was held the first in a series of elections to determine the permanent seat of county government. This special election brought 1260 voters to the polls. Seven hundred fifty-nine cast their votes in favor of La Grande and 501 for Union, known generally at that time as "Uniontown". This mandate of the people, that La Grande should be the county seat, led the court to buy from Green Arnold for \$2000 the building in which the court had been meeting. Bids were also solicited for the building of a county jail, and in November, 1865, a contract in the amount of \$2,050 was let for its construction.

The question of locating the county seat was brought before the voters of Union County for a second time in 1874. Citizens of Union had never been satisfied that the proper site for the county records was at the west end of the Grande Ronde Valley and far from the center of population of the County, which at that time included the Powder River and Pine Valley country. La Grande was the larger town and it claimed to be the center of the commercial activity of the county. It was also on the main line of the stage coaches from Umatilla Landing to the Idaho mines, which was probably the reason that it was selected by the legislature in 1864.

Union, however, grew rapidly, being located in

a rich agricultural area and close to the mines of the eastern section of the county. Agitation for the relocation of the county seat commenced after the election of 1865, and, in 1872, Senator Hendershott secured the passage of an act in the state legislature calling for a revote on the question. This enabling act provided that at the presidential election of that year a vote should be taken on the proposition, and the five towns of the county, La Grande, Union, Island City, Cove and Summerville, should be the candidates for the honor. If no one of these towns received a majority of the votes cast, then a later election should be held at which the two communities that had received the highest votes would be the contenders.

This election, in 1872, gave La Grande the highest vote of the five communities, but it was less than the majority required. Union and Cove were so close for the second place that the counting of six votes cast by the Wilkinson family of High Valley for "Forest Cove" would change the result. If they were counted for Cove, Cove would win; if they were thrown out as not being for a candidate locality, Union would win.

The community of Cove was first known as "Forest Cove" and that name was asked for for the new Post Office in 1868, but since it was so similar to Forest Grove which was already an office in Oregon, the postal department shortened it to "Cove". It took time for many residents to become accustomed to the new official name; therefore, the votes for Forest Cove resulted.

A heated dispute arose immediately and Union insisted upon its rights according to a strict interpretation of the returns, which would have thrown out

six of the votes in question. Citizens of Cove were at first inclined to contend for the six votes which were admittedly meant for Cove, but upon advice of local counsel they desisted from this course. Had the election been between La Grande and Cove, La Grande undoubtedly would have won.



#### COURT HOUSE AT UNION

Located where Union High School now stands.

Samuel Hannah, a leading merchant of Union, was elected to the state senate in 1872, and, while a member of that body, he induced the Northwestern Stage Company, then operating through the Grande Ronde Valley by way of La Grande, to re-locate the route to pass over the Blue Mountains by way of Summerville and the Thomas & Ruckles road rather than by the Emigrant Road through La Grande. La Grande was thus placed on a branch stage line, which influenced voters of the northern end of the county to support Union. Together with the support of Cove and the "Panhandle" communities Union received a majority vote of 163; the vote being: Union, 505; La Grande, 342.

The county records were removed to Union almost immediately and a temporary court house was set up there. A new brick court house was soon erected at a cost of \$15,000, on the block where the Union High School now stands.

John Creighton and G. H. Fletcher were awarded the contract for moving the county jail from La Grande to Union. This structure had been built solidly of logs hewed to the dimensions of about a foot square and spiked one on top of another, and presented a real moving problem, as over much of the distance between the two towns the ground was of unstable bottom. One report states that two heavy timbers were placed under each end of the building in the form of an axle and that rollers cut from logs over three feet in width were used to roll the building to its destination. Oxen were used in drawing the heavy load, and ruts made by the rollers were from six to twelve inches deep and were visible for many years across the valley. Another report states that heavy planks were used as skids and that for years, worn-out planks could be seen along the route. Whatever method was used, it must have constituted a major problem to move this heavy building over that distance with primitive equipment and unfavorable terrain.

The loss of the court house in 1874 was a distinct blow to the town of La Grande. The only newspaper then operating in the county, the "Mountain Sentinel", published by McComas and Stevens, was removed from La Grande to Union, and one of the leading merchants, I. A. Boskowitz, moved his stock of goods to the new seat of government. La Grande had but little left, although it did retain the United States land office which in its way was a considerable stimulus to local trade and business. The state land of-

fice, which had been established to dispose of a large tract of land donated to the state by the federal government, had been located in Union from its opening.



**IN FRONT OF COURT HOUSE AT UNION — 1888**

In back row from left: No. 5, Robert Eakin; No. 6, Ben Brown; No. 7, Judge Mansfield Harrison.

Citizens of La Grande, however, were not willing to give in easily to their rival town across the valley, and plans were laid to regain the county seat. In 1888 two meetings were held to consider the advisability of petitioning the legislature to pass an enabling act to permit calling another election. When news of this activity reached Union, a meeting was held there at which it was stated in formal resolutions that the La Grande proposals were premature and, if successful, would saddle the county with great debt through the expense of moving the county seat, and would add increased mileage expenses for jurors and witnesses who would have to travel further to the county seat; undoubtedly a part of Union County would be cut off and added to Baker County. This last prediction came true in 1901.

In the election held in 1890, following the passage of the enabling act by the legislature, Union was successful in retaining the county seat. However, after the "Panhandle" area, which included the towns of Sparta and Cornucopia, was detached from Union County as above noted, Union lost much of the voting support which had enabled it to hold the county seat, and at an election in 1904, La Grande was finally successful in retrieving the seat of county government which it had lost in 1874.

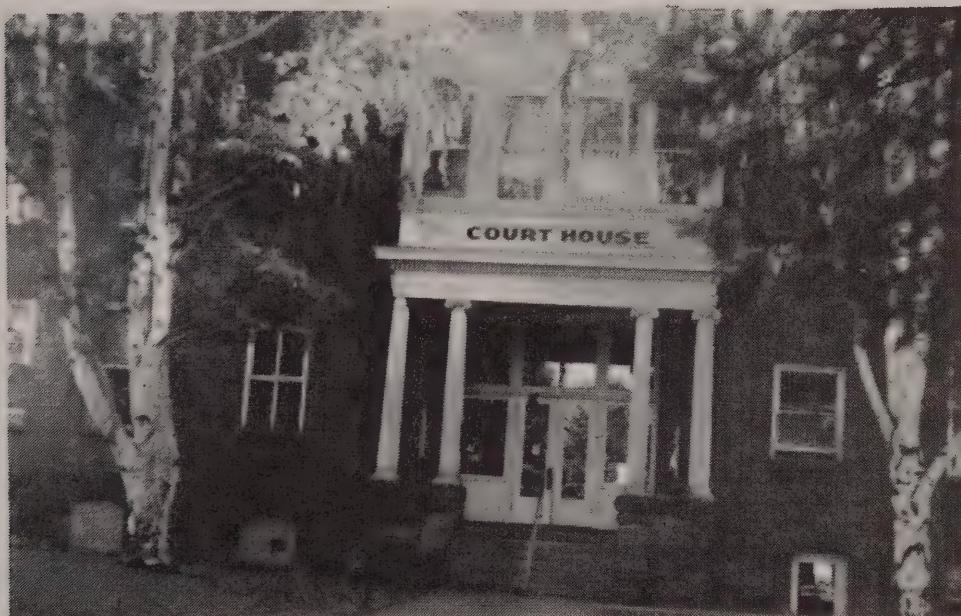


#### UNION COUNTY COURT — 1900

Henry Hug, Geo. Brown, Judge B. F. Wilson

As an inducement to the voters to move the county seat back to La Grande, the people of La Grande had made arrangements to lease their new city hall at Fourth and L Streets for 15 years at \$1.00 per year. Immediately after the election the county records were moved to this building. After the 15 years had expired the building was leased for three years for \$300 per month, and then it was purchased for the sum of bonded indebtedness against it; none of the bonds having previously been paid, this amounted to some \$33,000.

From time to time minor repairs and alterations have been made to the building. The most extensive were changes made in the basement as WPA and PWA projects during the 1930's. County business has increased some as the years passed, until at the present time more room could be well used and a more fireproof building would be more suitable for the many records; however, on the whole, county government has had a comfortable and permanent home since 1904.



**UNION COUNTY COURT HOUSE**

Shows present Union County Court House at La Grande, Oregon

## Chapter VII

# *Trails and Roads*

### **INDIAN:**

Before the introduction of the horse all travel was on foot and few structures could be made. Natural barriers stood in defiance of man. It is true that a tree that fell across a creek would make a good foot bridge. A tree could be so felled by man, but the labor required with crude methods seldom made it worthwhile. Large streams, especially in flood season, were a menace to travel, especially to children and old people.

Rocky, open hillsides and ridges were easier to follow than brushy stream banks. The Nez Perce Trail from Wallowa passed over Smith Mountain rather than down the Wallowa River canyon. How and how much early Nez Perce people crossed the Wallowa at high water in the spring we can only guess; possibly they used crude rafts. Once on the Union county side, all of the Cricket Flat country and the east side of the valley were open for travel without crossing the Grande Ronde. Later in the summer these rivers were little hazard. Men went many places and had many dim trails, but the trail of the Nez Perce to Indian Valley was one of the main ancient routes, the natural route across the mountain fence to the east.

The Walla Wallas had an old and practical trail for the months when the snow was not too deep in the Tollgate region. They followed ridges south of the Walla Walla River, crossed the divide through the Tollgate and Spout Springs country, then came down the ridge north of Gordon Creek to Indian Valley. The Umatillas came over the north part of Mt.

Emily, thence down past Sanderson Springs and Phillips Creek canyon to Indian Valley or south into Grande Ronde Valley.

Cayuse came from Pilot Rock and Ukiah country in through Starkey, usually to go to Baker Valley, but sometimes to the Grande Ronde.

The south side of the county had less rugged mountains and afforded routes by way of Ladd Canyon, Pyle Canyon and Catherine Creek, all leading toward the Snake River country. North from Indian Valley, the present Palmer Valley and Troy roads follow the way to the old land of Waluawa, or from the extreme north point of Cricket Flat one could cross the Wallowa River and go down the east side of the Grande Ronde.

The introduction of the horse in the early 1700's did not change the location of trails a great deal. It was easier to cross rivers and larger tepees could be carried. People could go farther and faster and have more comfortable camps, but centuries of past travel had selected the most practical routes.

## MOUNTAIN MEN:

Early explorers used Indian guides when possible and followed Indian trails. Fur traders came closely behind exploration. These men, whom we today refer to as "mountain men" lived as friends with the Indian, and often had Indian wives. They roamed the mountains and traded for furs that the Indians harvested for them. Nearly always they were in the employ of one of the big fur companies who had base camps at Astoria along the Columbia. Few of these men had any material, desire or ability to keep journals, but could we know the story of their lives and travels over our county, it would be revealing and fascinating.

They also followed the established routes of travel, but pack trains of furs and supplies sometimes justified trail improvement. First settlers around Mt. Harris and Pumpkin Ridge reported an old badly rotted bridge across the Grande Ronde at the present location of the Overhead Bridge on highway 82. The supposition is that trees were cut on the west bank of the river to fall across the narrow channel. By prying these logs up on rock piers they could build a bridge. Pack trains of furs from the Snake River could then come down the east edge of the valley and here cross the Grande Ronde on their way to the Columbia, without swimming their horses and wetting their packs.

During these days more exploration was going on. In October of 1843, Captain Fremont entered the Grande Ronde Valley by way of the Ladd Canyon Hill, went north along the Walla Walla Trail across Indian Valley and up Gordon Creek and on to the Whitman Mission near Walla Walla. He speaks of his slow travel up through the timber after leaving Indian Valley because of the many trees he was obliged to cut to allow his wagons to pass over the trail.

This same year, 1843, the Great Migration of emigrants to the Willamette Valley were coming down Ladd Canyon, skirting along the west edge of the valley and going over the hills west of where La Grande now is, following the Indian route to the Starkey country then hewing a road over to the Umatilla side.

## MINERS:

Each year travel continued over the Oregon Trail; the fur trader continued to build his log huts and, in partnership with the Indian, harvested the crop of furs, but there was a new line of development. Emigrants were commencing to deviate from the purpose

of going to western Oregon to establish homes. Men strayed from the Oregon Trail in search of gold. Some was found. Prospectors roamed the Oregon country from Alaska to California. Various places paying mines developed. As before mentioned, mines of Eastern Oregon caused the establishment of Baker county in 1862 and the mining camp city of Auburn with some 5,000 population was named the county seat.

Miners and mining operations required supplies. Supplies must come by way of the Pacific Ocean and Portland. Boats brought supplies up the Columbia to The Dalles and Umatilla Landing. Walla Walla became a distribution point. The present Gardner's Store of Walla Walla, then known as Schwabacher's, operated pack trains into mining camps from British Columbia to southern Idaho. Old accounts tell us that in 1862 Walla Walla merchants paid Fred Nodine of Union and "Three Fingered Smith" \$300 to improve the Walla Walla Trail over the Blue Mountains so their pack trains could better reach the mines of the Powder River and Baker Valleys.

In 1863 the Daley road across the hills from North Powder to Pilot Rock was opened. This cut off some 25 miles from the Oregon Trail route, but it did have steeper hills and higher summits. It was used for stages, empty wagons, and light travel.

## PIONEER ROADS:

Much travel over the Oregon Trail had established the road from North Powder to La Grande. Likewise emigrants had opened a road down Pyle Canyon into Union. As homesteaders moved farther out, individually or in cooperation with neighbors, they built their own roads to the nearest town.

On March 9, 1865, one of the early business trans-

actions of the new county of Union was the granting of a petition by Charles Goodnough to build a road from Ora Dell east along the north side of the river to intersect the Walla Walla road.



#### FREIGHT TEAM IN EARLY DAYS

This became the first county road of Union county and was constructed under the supervision of Judge Lichtenholer and his court. In late years it has been officially named the "Black Hawk Trail" in honor of a friendly Umatilla who frequently visited in the homes of homesteaders who lived on the road.

It would be well for the reader to bear in mind that travel in the Grande Ronde Valley in early days was much more difficult than at present, not only because of the lack of roads, but because of the many swamps and sloughs that were later drained. From La Grande across the valley to Cove and Union much of the distance was in big cattail swamps. Folks went around the foot hills or down the center of the

valley on what is known as the "Sand Ridge", where the Walla Walla Road that was mentioned above led north toward Indian Valley and ultimately Walla Walla.



WALLOWA STAGE LEAVING ELGIN ON WAY TO JOSEPH



LIVERY BARN

(The "Service Station" in days of the Horse)

The county was soon divided into road districts with some local man as road supervisor. The county used funds raised by taxation to construct some bad-



Hauling Sacked Wheat Waiting to Unload at Imbler



Lumber Teams Unloading at Railroad Station

ly needed bridges and at times furnished money to the road districts for construction and maintenance of county roads in their district. However, money was scarce in those days and much road construction was financed by what was known as a poll tax, which required each adult man to furnish two days labor each

year for road work. The district road supervisor acted as construction foreman.

The many miles of road that must be built and maintained made any heavy grading and rock surfacing quite impossible. During the rainy season mud was deep and nearly any road in the county at certain times of the year was impassable with a wagon and team. Snow drifted in most roads because of the many rail fences, and winter travel often went out across the fields.

## EARLY HIGHWAYS:

Before the coming of the railroad in 1884, all freight and passenger travel was by team and over the mountain roads that led to the outside world. Possibly the name "highway" is not an appropriate name for them, but to differentiate between these main roads and the country, or local roads, we will think of them as early highways. Like the country roads they were of necessity crudely built and lacked rock surface.

The Pyle Canyon road received some improvements and continued in use. The Daley Road gradually lost its traffic to the Oregon Trail, which was graded along Ladd Creek instead of climbing the hill from the valley. It was also moved from the hill west of La Grande to the river canyon past Ora Dell and Perry.

The Walla Walla Trail was opened to traffic and became known as the Linton Road. In 1879 a new branch was built from the top of the mountain along the ridge west of Little Phillips Creek and then down a grade into the creek, to lead past Sanderson Springs and Summerville. Summerville was the only town in the north end of the county as this was before Elgin was started. The old road from the top of the mountain east into Indian Valley by way of Gordon

Creek had little use until Elgin came into being, and travel again went from Elgin this way on what was then called the Rock Hill road to Spout Springs near where the Summerville branch joined.

The Wallowa road as before mentioned cut diagonally northeast across the Cricket Flat country to the top of Wallowa hill in early days and down a steep ridge to Minam. Residents of Wallowa in the 1870's graded a road through the river canyon to avoid crossing the top of Smith Mountain where the Nez Perce trail went. When Elgin was established in 1885 freight and stage were shifted through this settlement. With the completion of the railroad in 1890 all freight and stage communication to Wallowa went from Elgin out east of Elgin up the Fish Trap Hill of the Nez Perce Trail.

Constant travel over this unsurfaced road with all of the Wallowa traffic, and in a part for the county with a 25 inch rainfall, made it famous for its hills and mud holes. Much bad language was used by the salty old freighters, and many are the stories of Wallowa travel across Cricket Flat and down Wallowa Hill.

A fictitious story that was used to encourage (?) strangers who must travel this road in bad weather is so impressive of conditions that we will include it here:

A man was traveling to Wallowa from Elgin during the rainy season. He was using the safest method, walking, in the fields beside the road. As he was crossing the deep black soil of the Parsons and Blanchard places on Cricket Flat he noticed a good hat lying on the mud in the road. Not wishing to walk into the deep mud of the road he took a stick from the rail fence and endeavored to rake the hat out to where he could reach it. To his surprise he found

that it was on a man's head. The man barely had his nose above the mud. The traveler hastily summoned help from some freighters.

Freighters by necessity were experts in the mud and shortly the unfortunate man was pulled to solid ground, very grateful for having his life saved. Pretty soon he became quite solemn and thoughtful and said, 'I sure hate to lose that horse. That was an awful good horse that I was riding'."

About 1900 Union and Wallowa counties built a new switchback grade down the steep Wallowa Hill. It was a major engineering job of some 3 miles of grade on this rugged hillside, an improvement over the old route down a steep ridge, but still full of thrills for the traveler. It continued in use for some 20 years.

The old Umatilla Trail route over the mountain at Ruckle northwest of Summerville was improved in early days to permit wagon traffic. In the battle between La Grande and Union over the location of the county seat a big argument in favor of keeping the seat of government at the west edge of the county in La Grande was that this was on the through stage route along the Oregon Trail. In 1872 a Union merchant, Samuel Hannah, was elected to the state senate, and while a member of that body he induced the Northwestern Stage Company, then operating through the Grande Ronde Valley by way of La Grande, to relocate the route to pass over the Blue Mountains by way of Summerville and the Thomas & Ruckles Road rather than by the Emigrant road through La Grande. This new stage route went from Summerville southeast onto the high part of the Sand Ridge and on to Union and up Pyle Canyon, leaving La Grande on a branch road. It is of interest to note that Thomas & Ruckles road followed the branch

of the Umatilla Trail that led into the camas meadows of the Grande Ronde Valley before homesteads were taken up. Farms and Summerville itself were located along this road, consequently the diagonal road through Summerville's main street and on out to the Summerville cemetery.

A severe storm in 1884 washed out much of the Thomas and Ruckles grade on the Umatilla side. Due to the completion of the Railroad into the valley that year, and other reasons, expensive repairs were not made and the old road that had been the main line of travel over the mountains for several years, was abandoned.

Another route into the valley that developed some years later than the ones we have mentioned was up Catherine Creek from Union, through the Park, Medical Springs and to the mines of the Powder River portion of the county. This was the closest way to the mines which were quite active.

How well these old Indian trails were located and how wise pioneers were in following them, is born out by the fact that every one of the above routes into the Valley are now modern paved highways, excepting one, the Thomas and Ruckles route, and that has barely missed. In another chapter mention is made of railroad surveys to tunnel the high narrow ridge under what is known as the Big Saddle. This was again given serious consideration in locating the freeway from the Grande Ronde to Pendleton, and might have been chosen had La Grande not have been opposed to being so far away from the highway. Today loggers have again constructed gravel surfaced roads to cross the Ruckles route.

## AUTOMOBILE ROADS:

Large sales of automobiles between 1910 and 1920

sparked a public agitation for good roads; graveled roads that would not become soft and muddy, roads with gradual grades, roads for auto travel. Eastern states were building good graveled highways. The Oregon Trail should become a transcontinental highway. "Put every county seat on a highway", became a slogan. That would mean a road to Enterprise. By 1920 these projects were under way. The roads were narrow and crooked by present standards, but miles of roads for the money spent was the goal. "Get people out of the mud."



**PRESIDENT HARDING AT MEACHAM**

On July 3, 1923, a great celebration was held on top of the Blue Mountains at Meacham. The last link in the new Oregon Trail was being completed. A graveled highway would now extend from Portland to the east coast and pass through the Grande Ronde Valley.

President Harding came for the occasion. Twenty five thousand people traveled by train and by the

new highway to the top of the mountain to celebrate an epoch in American history and to hear our president eulogize the men and women who traveled this Oregon Trail in covered wagons to build the Northwest. It had been just 80 years since the first great migration of 1843 had started and 62 years since the first settlers stayed over winter in the Grande Ronde.

Hundreds of these old covered wagon travelers had made great effort to be on hand. Some 200 registered their names in a book where the President was served dinner. Four of these when registering stated that they had been born on the wagon train trin west. It was a gathering that could never happen again.



#### **OREGON TRAIL MARKER AT LA GRANDE, OREGON**

The President was driven from his train to the picnic grounds in an old Concord stage by an old veteran driver. He was served bear meat at a picnic dinner by pioneer women in old time costume. A frontier village was constructed and covered wagons were circled in camp for a mock Indian attack put on by local Indians. The President drove to Emigrant Springs where he dedicated a monument in memory of the old emigrants. It was to be a rest park by

the cold spring in the shade of the big evergreen trees, where so many old time travelers found comfort after their long journey across the hot dry Snake River desert. President Harding took much pleasure in his day's work of living with and honoring the old pioneers, and was proud that the nation now had a highway to honor them and that so many had lived to see this accomplishment.



#### **SNOW REMOVAL**

Snow removal in early days was done as shown above with a team of horses pulling a road grader.

The Old Oregon Trail was by no means the only graveled highway under construction. The county and state worked to connect all county seats with highways, then all towns of any importance. The 1919 State Legislature passed a Grange sponsored bill that provided for the levy of one mill state tax each year which was allocated to the counties to build well-graded and graveled farm-to-market roads. Since that day Union county has continued on a program of permanent road construction with the aim of improving rural mail routes and school bus routes as soon as possible. Moving logs long distances by truck to the mills has caused the construction of good access roads into the timbered portions of the

county. Today Union County has a pretty wide network of rock surfaced roads.

### THE PAVEMENTS:

Much traveled highways give better service and demand less upkeep when they are paved. Soon highway paving was started in the county. Year by year more mileage was laid. Increasing auto travel and movement of freight by motor truck demanded wider and straighter grades. New alignments were made, grades were widened and each year sees more miles of paved highway. Roads have taken about the same priority for paving as they did for gravel. Today all towns are connected with pavements, and several crossroads are also paved.



**Modern Snow Removal  
Old Oregon Trail**



**"OLD OREGON TRAIL" with  
new look near Union-Umatilla  
County line.**

Gravel and pavement overcame the problem of mud, but they do not make a year round road without provision for snow removal. County and state operated snow plows, including rotary plows copied after those used on the railroad, snow fences, and high grades, have made winter travel possible. New highways are now being graded high enough that in most places the wind will sweep the snow off. Modern snow removal equipment has made possible con-

tinuous auto traffic over the Blue Mountain passes during winter months. Snow on the Tollgate pass on highway 204 becomes each winter from 6 to 10 feet deep on the level, but rotary plows have kept the highway clear of snow since 1948.



The New Oregon Trail Just West of La Grande

Today thousands of privately owned automobiles travel the highways of Union county to bring all communities within a few minutes of each other. Instead of widely scattered communities it has become one. Passenger busses carry travelers to all parts of the nation on regular schedules. Small trucks have replaced the horse and wagon. Large truck lines and logging trucks haul tremendous loads all distances.

This transportation change has again brought change to the use of the Old Oregon Trail. It is now being rebuilt into a four lane freeway to handle modern traffic. Millions of dollars are being spent to build just the part of freeway from La Grande west to the Umatilla county line.

## Chapter VII

# Railroads

### SURVEYS:

Regardless of the number and quality of wagon roads of early days they did not solve long distance transportation. Grande Ronde Valley needed rail connection with Portland and the east.

Following the Civil War there was renewed activity in western railroad construction and the first line to the Pacific coast was completed in 1869. In 1865 the War Department sent Major Hudnutt to investigate possible routes for a line from about Granger, Wyoming, to the Pacific Northwest. General Grenville M. Dodge, chief engineer of the Union Pacific, also stated that he considered his system to be unfinished until a connection was made with the Columbia and Puget Sound.

The Hudnutt surveying party reached the Grande Ronde in 1869, laying out a route which closely followed the Old Oregon Trail, and which was virtually unchanged when construction commenced about ten years later.

Near the northern boundary of Baker county this survey left the Old Oregon Trail and came into the valley by way of Powder River and down Pyle Canyon and thence by the most direct route to the mouth of the Grande Ronde River canyon, thence up the river and across the Blue Mountains by way of Meacham Creek Pass. It is interesting to note that after several years and considerable controversy the road was built along the whole length of this route.

Following the Hudnutt survey, but little was done looking toward the building of the line. However, businessmen in Portland realized that to build their city,

they must have rail connection with the east. They organized the Portland, Dalles and Salt Lake Railway, with a pioneer resident, W. S. Chapman, principal sponsor.

This organization spurred the hopes of residents of the Grande Ronde but tangible results were slow. It was 1882 before the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company under the leadership of Henry Villard completed a line up the south bank of the Columbia to Umatilla to connect with the Northern Pacific Railroad.

### CONSTRUCTION BEGINS:

Growing impatient, public spirited citizens of the Grande Ronde in 1878 organized a company to build a railroad from La Grande to Umatilla Landing. Interested parties sent teams and scrapers across the mountain where considerable grading was done from Umatilla eastward in the fall and early winter. It is quite possible that the object of this company, the Columbia River and Blue Mountain Railroad Company, was to get the bigger companies started. This happened. Villard was vitally interested in building east and the project was turned over to him entirely



**OLD TIME SECTION CREW IN UNION COUNTY**

for no other consideration than definite assurance by him that the line would be built into the Grande Ronde Valley.

Villard shortly began construction. By 1882 work had commenced on the heavy grades on the west side of the mountain. The actual construction was by quite primitive methods. A large portion of the work was done with Chinese laborers supplied by a Chinese company in San Francisco, using picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. Miles and miles of this grade were thus constructed. In some of the deep cuts and long fills horses and two wheeled dump carts were used.

At the time Villard was building east, the Union Pacific under the direction of Jay Gould was building west and had reached Shoshone in Idaho. A genuine race was in the offing to see who would build the greater mileage before the lines were joined.

One evening in the summer of 1882 a string of six horse teams came from the west, passed down C Street, which was then the main street of La Grande and encamped on the east side of town. The wagons were loaded with Chinese laborers, wheelbarrows, shovels, picks, and other construction tools. But try as they might, citizens of La Grande could not get an inkling of what was to be constructed. The Chinese could not talk English and the whites would not talk.

It was several days before light came. The Villard group were moving into Burnt River Canyon to try to beat the Union Pacific, or that part of the Union Pacific then known as the Oregon Short Line. This canyon was the only logical route for a railroad.

The Short Line did send surveyors and construction crews in and as employees were loyal to their companies it looked for a time like there might be

violence. However, since the O. R. & N. were first on the ground, the Short Line finally pulled out. An agreement was reached between the representatives of the two companies, at a meeting in New York in March of 1883, when it was decided that the two lines would join at Huntington. This was accomplished on November 24, 1884 and through rail service between Portland and the east commenced. At the ceremonies attendant to joining of the rails, United States Senator James N. Slater of La Grande was principal speaker. He stopped on his way to Washington to attend the opening of Congress.

## ROUTE THROUGH THE VALLEY:

Building the railroad through Grande Ronde Valley was as big a problem as through the mountains. The roads in the mountains made steady progress, but it was almost a year before a permanent line was established between Oro Dell and the Powder River Divide. The first surveys called for the line to go east on the north side of the river and the swamps below Hot Lake and up the east side of Pyle canyon by way of Union.



MALLETT FREIGHT ENGINE AT LA GRANDE

Surveys and re-surveys were made across the valley. A survey was made by way of Ladd Canyon, but it was not feasible, because of the crossing of the east fork of Ladd Creek, where a very high bridge or trestle would be required. Ten years later better construction methods might have made this practicable. Likewise serious consideration was given to running the line north to strike the mountain west of Summerville and tunnel under the Big Saddle and thence down the Umatilla River to Pendleton. In those days long tunnels were more of a problem, and this idea was abandoned. Another tentative survey for going east was to start climbing the hill west of Hot Lake and gradually climb out of Pyle Canyon. This would have so gradual a grade that helper engines would not have been necessary.

Another factor in locating the railroad through the valley was community rivalry, both political and economical, between La Grande and Union. Each was interested in being as close as possible to the main line, with the other removed from the railroad as far as possible. Citizens of influence in each of the towns made every effort to ingratiate themselves with the engineering staff of the railroad company making the surveys in the area in the hope that all of the advantages of being the center of railroad activity might be theirs.

The engineers appeared to favor building the line up the east side of Pyle Canyon — what now appears to have been a logical route — and in the little town of Union there was much rejoicing. A community ball and general jollification was held in honor of the railway engineers. Certain of the more enterprising and over optimistic, members of the community ordered a large quantity of dimension timbers from local saw mills and had them delivered for bridge work on the deep side ravine which comes into Pyle Canyon

just above Union. Needless to say there was much dissatisfaction in La Grande when the citizens learned what was happening, and they took steps to bring what influence they could upon railroad officials in Portland to stay with the original Hudnutt survey down the west side of Pyle Canyon.

Just at this point Engineer Mix was transferred to Burnt River and a new man by the name of Wood was sent from the East to replace him. He re-examined all of the surveys and then proceeded to build up the west side of the Pyle Canyon, thus leaving Union about three miles away from the line.

At this day it is hard to evaluate all of the reasons why the road was built in a certain place. Each route had some advantages and some disadvantages. The route was now crossing some unstable valley land that was hard to make a solid road bed on, and it encountered snow hazards on the hill above Union.

It is true that the railroad sought gifts of money and land from communities the road served. La Grande furnished right of way from Oro Dell to Hot Lake to get the road on the south side of the river and closer to Old Town. Citizens of Union were reputed to have not met the railroad's requests for donations, thinking the line was already established as to route.

## BATTLE FOR DIVISION POINT:

After the exact route was settled, the battle for the location of the division point and railroad shops commenced. Would it be at Hilgard, the foot of the mountains and ideal place to keep helper engines and the headquarters of railway construction? Would it be the old stage station of North Powder which had suddenly come to life as the line came through it? Would it be the ambitious little town of La Grande?

Daniel Chaplin is given much credit for the final location of the shops in La Grande. Although not a man of wealth, he donated to the railroad virtually all of what is now known as Chaplin's Addition of La Grande and all land necessary for shops, round-house, yards and tracks. Chaplin's public spirited generosity proved to be the greatest factor in causing La Grande to build into a city. For many, many years the railroad payroll was a big item in La Grande's economy.



**SHAY LOGGING ENGINE**

On Big Creek & Telocaset RR Co., road to Pondosa

### **SNOW PLOW:**

The heavy falls of snow coupled with driving winter winds in the Blue Mountains and up Pyle Canyon created serious problems in maintaining traffic during the early days in winter months. Blades were attached to the front of the engines to plow snow to one side as the trains went by, but they were inadequate to cope with deep drifts. John Bergendahl, who serviced the water supplies for the steam railway engines, one day in 1885 watched the windmill at Telocaset pumping away in a snow storm. He noticed how the blades of the mill threw the snow

away. This gave him the idea of building the rotary snow plow, and he went to work at it. Although he was unfortunate in that he received no compensation for his invention, he did revolutionize snow removal and made possible much of our winter traffic by rail and by highway.



**PUSH TYPE SNOW PLOW ON RAILROAD ENGINE**



**ROTARY RAILROAD SNOW PLOW AT KAMELA**

### **CENTRAL RAILROAD OF OREGON:**

In the 1890's a branch line of railroad was con-

structed from Union Junction to Union, a distance of 2 1/2 miles, and a little later on to Cove. It was known as the Central Railroad of Oregon. The portion to Cove was abandoned in 1924 after highway freight trucks came into use.



CENTRAL RAILROAD OF OREGON — ABOUT 1910

### RAILROAD TO ELGIN:

Soon after the railroad came through the Grande Ronde Valley public sentiment demanded a branch line that would reach north into Indian Valley and on to Wallowa County. The late 1880's saw 20 miles of line being constructed to the new town of Elgin that was springing up at the old Indian camp in Indian Valley. The line went northeast past Island City and on to the center of the valley where the ground was higher and more stable, turned nearly due north at Conley station and headed directly for the river canyon between Mt. Harris and Pumpkin Ridge. Alicel, Imbler and Rinehart were stations along the line. The track was completed in the last days of 1889.

Much of this grade was in the level sandridge

soil of Grande Ronde Valley and was done with horses and scrapers. In the rock cuts of the river canyon the grade was built by hand by about 100 Italians.

## HUNT RAILROAD:

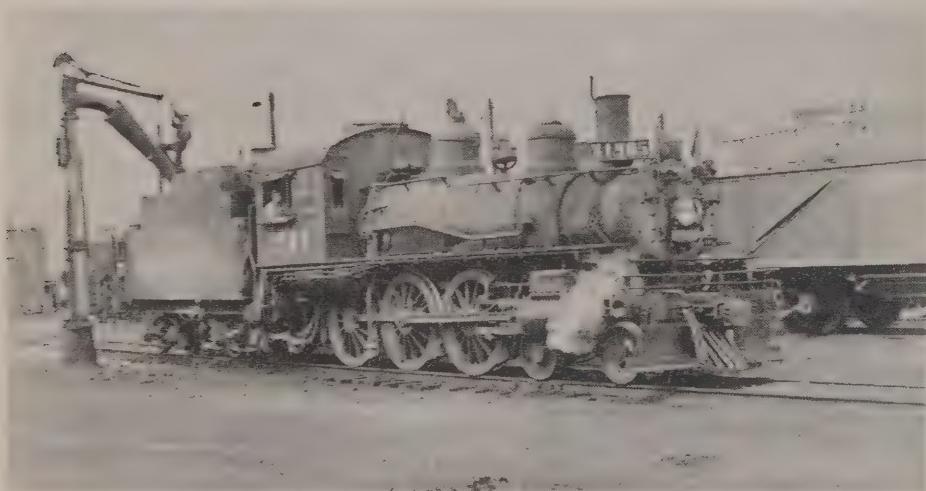
A more expanded railroad project that failed to be completed was known as the "Hunt Railroad". The promoter of this line, G. W. Hunt, was an early wagon freighter over the Blue Mountains. Later he engaged in building grades for the Villard interests. Mr. Hunt, at the time his buildings were absorbed by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, had some 160 miles of line in Umatilla County and southeastern Washington.

In 1889 he announced his plan to construct a railroad from the vicinity of Walla Walla across the Blue Mountains by way of Toll Gate and into the Grande Ronde by way of Summerville, thence across the valley to Union. The line was to go up Catherine Creek to Eagle and Pine Valleys, on to the Snake River and to Boise. It would be a line competing with the Union Pacific.

Mr. Hunt offered to build the line if he was given a right of way through Summerville and Union and a cash subsidy of \$180,000. These terms were met by valley residents and surveyors began work in 1889. In February of 1890, actual grade construction was commenced at Union and the grade was built to Summerville. Here the work stopped rather suddenly, probably because of financial difficulties on the part of Mr. Hunt. Portions of this grade can still be seen across the valley, but after Mr. Hunt sold his railroads to the Northern Pacific, nothing more was done to complete the Grande Ronde extension of the Northern Pacific Lines.

## RAILROAD TO WALLOWA COUNTY:

For some 15 years Elgin had remained the rail-head for the north end of the county and also all of Wallowa County. Much freight and many travelers demanded an extension into Wallowa. A mysterious crew commenced grading down the river below Elgin. Shortly the Union Pacific System came on the scene and took over. Work commenced in 1905 and was completed to Joseph in the fall of 1908. A man by the name of McCabe had the contract from Elgin to the junction of the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers (Rondowa). His headquarters was at Elgin. Erick-



PACIFIC TYPE ENGINE

Built for short turns. Used on Wallowa Branch Line. son and Peterson had the contract from Rondowa to Joseph. Their headquarters was at Minam, which was then in Union County. Much hand work was used on this grade, but the major part of the yardage was moved by horses.

Moving the large body of timber from Palmer Valley may have been one thing that started the construction of this extension. The road to Palmer Junc-

tion (which is now called Looking Glass) was completed and log trains were running before the Wallowa end was finished. This was the last railroad construction in the county before the auto truck and auto stage commenced taking over as freight and passenger carriers.

## Chapter IX

# Mines

### INFLUENCE OF SETTLEMENT:

In view of the fact that every traveler that left a record of passing through the Grande Ronde Valley prior to settlement was impressed by its beauty and potential economic value, it is strange that some did not stay. In 1855 Chief Lawyer of the Nez Perce Indians offered General J. H. Stevens' party five hundred ponies if they would stay in the valley, put up a mill and help break their Cayuse horses to work in harness. The white man's wheat flour and some of his skills were important to the Indian. However, conflicts between the races made the white man cautious about settling in isolated locations.

After 1860 gold strikes in what is now Baker County brought prospectors. Mining camps mushroomed into small towns. Supplies were being freighted over long distances. Miners needed food. The Grande Ronde Valley could produce many kinds of badly needed food, and it was close enough to the mines to have a certain amount of protection. People settled, grew crops and raised livestock and sold their produce to the mining camps. Food was hauled to the Boise mines, but the chief market was in the placer and hard rock mines around Baker.

### BAKER AND PANHANDLE MINES:

Although not now in Union County, mines of the Panhandle country were in Union County until 1901 when it was transferred to Baker county in a political maneuver to move the county seat. The Panhandle country included the northeastern part of the present Baker County, including the Powder River, Eagle Valley and Pine Valley areas. In the upheaval of the

mountains of the Panhandle, molten rock was forced up through fissure veins where rich deposits of gold quartz were formed. We will briefly mention a few of these mines.

In 1862 a rumored gold strike on Powder River brought a party from Auburn to investigate. Near the present site of Sparta they found Mr. Kooster and another man rocking gold dust. Placer gold was found in quantity in all of the gulches. Water was scarce and some sacked their ore and carried it to water to wash it. The place was named Sparta because the people were like the old Greeks, they never gave up. Chinese laborers were imported to dig a ditch with pick and shovel to Eagle Creek thirty miles away, and to work in the mines. At one time 1000 Chinese and 500 whites made up the town. The new ditch carried 75 cubic feet of water per second. Sparta prospered and in the 1870's had a population of 3,000. The mother lode was never found but a quartz mine at Gem was worked until 1914.

In the Sanger ("Hog-em") area the placers produced about \$500,000 in gold dust. The Summit Lode, the Lilly White, the Dolly Varden and the Snowstorm were some of the paying hard rock mines. One writer estimates that about \$93,000,000 was taken from this area up to 1914.

Cornucopia is a hard rock mine 1400 feet above Bonanza Basin, which has an elevation of 6000 feet, high in the hills north of Pine Valley. It was discovered in the 1880's but its inaccessibility made it slow in developing. Other rich mines were discovered in the immediate vicinity: the Last Chance, Union Companion, Red Jacket. Expensive machinery, including the world's largest aerial tramway, with a span of 5500 feet, were installed. The mines operated until World War II when the government confiscated the machinery for war use.

## SAND AND GRAVEL:

Sand and gravel are the most valuable mineral resource of the United States, because they are used in tremendous quantities. Union County is blessed with ample deposits of sand and gravel, particularly along the many miles of river bed of the Grande Ronde. Although early buildings were constructed of native stone, nearly all large or permanent buildings are now made of concrete from local gravel. In fact, the Island City Concrete Pipe Co. for year has manufactured and sold precast concrete structures.

## CAMP CARSON:

In the late fall of 1862, two men, a Mr. Doty and Mr. Kilgore, were riding horseback across the mountains in an effort to locate a shorter route for wagon trains from Powder River to Umatilla. They killed an elk on the Grande Ronde at a point now known as Tanner's Gulch. After dressing the elk they went to the stream to wash and, ever on the look-out for signs of gold, they discovered gold in the sand of the creek.



**Hauling Pipe for the Placer Mines at Camp Carson**

This proved to be an area of cement gravel of

an ancient river bed. The cemented gravel made mining difficult. However many claims were staked out and the camp had a rather long and spotted history, changing hands quite often, sometimes paying fair returns, sometimes not. The mine was not worked after the early 1900's.

In 1867 a group of Chinese who were working the mine conceived the idea of bringing water from Anthony Creek, between Mud and Anthony Lakes and convey it to the Grande River water shed to the location of the mine which was on a hill above a water supple. The long ditch was completed by the Chinamen after fearful hardship. They carried their supplies up the hill in the most primitive way, with their load balanced on each end of a stick across their shoulders. After their canal had been built, farmers in the North Powder water shed refused to let them divert their irrigation water and their ditch was useless.

### **THE INDIANA MINE:**

Also in the Upper Grande Ronde water shed was the Indiana Mine which was a hard rock mine in a vein of gold and silver. It operated from a tunnel that followed the vein back into the hill and was producing good values at the stamp mill until it suddenly failed to produce good ore. A new superintendent was in charge and he had failed to notice that the tunnel had passed a fault and the vein had disappeared. The vein was never again located.

### **OTHER MINES:**

Many claims have been staked in different parts of the county but so far nothing has proven very spectaclar. Of recent years several uranium and copper claims have been staked in the upper Eagle Creek area of the east end of the county. For other

mining ventures in the upper Grande Ronde we will take the following highlights from a report of E. S. McComas made in a published report of 1900. Mr. McComas spent much time in the mines of the area, coming to Auburn in 1862. In 1895 he founded at La Grande the "North Pacific Mining Review" and acted as editor for a time.



#### **MINES SCENES ON UPPER GRANDE RONDE RIVER**

Upper left—Royal    Upper right—Standard    Bottom—Camp Carson

"The Camp Carson district begins at Quartz Cabin and mineral bearings are found from there to the lakes at the head of the river, the distance being 16 miles . . . At Quartz Cabin . . . porphyry contacts . . . at Sulphur Springs what is known as the Talent Lode . . . A few miles further . . . William Muir Claim with 600 ft. of tunnel . . . galena and blend . . . good ore on dump. Next "Pay Boy" 400 ft. tunnel . . . green copper with ruby silver . . . \$50 to \$150 values. Next "Mountain Bell" . . . promising. Next "Kansas" and "Tiger No. 2".

"In Tanner's Gulch are the "Tiger", Black Hawk" and "Tiger No. 3. The "Tiger" has shaft 100 ft. deep . . . grey copper, cuprite and sylvanite . . . \$5 to \$350 values.

"Royal No. 1" and "No. 2" . . . 200 ft. tunnel . . . grey copper and graphic tellurium . . . some assays 17 ounces of gold.

"Ohio Girl" and "Oregon Maid" on same vein as Royal 80 ft. tunnel steam hoist and pump in the camp. The ore teträhedrite and chalcophyrite.

"Standard No. Land 2" 160 ft. tunnel . . . stibnite, galena and iron pyrites."

McComas points out other Union County locations:

"About 14 miles up Catherine Creek from Union there is a large ledge of low grade ore that has promise . . . Down Powder River about Thief Valley there are promising ledges . . . West of North Powder along Wolf Creek are ledges that have not been sufficiently developed."

## Chapter X

# *Agriculture*

### **EARLY AGRICULTURE:**

Early agriculture consisted at first of growing crops for food for the first settlers. Vegetable seeds and seed grain came on the wagon trains and several early accounts speak of emigrants going, soon after arriving in the Grande Ronde, to Walla Walla or The Dalles for supplies and such things as seed potatoes. Within a very few years the virgin soil of the valley was producing ample food. Newcomers could secure seed from older residents. Farm land had to be fenced and crude implements were used, but it was a land that could, and did, produce.

Early in 1862 Conrad Miller left his cabin in what is now west Union and went to Vancouver to secure a stock of fruit trees. That fall he returned with his trees, which were mostly apples, there also being some pears, and thereby laid the foundation for the future fruit industry of the county. Other nursery-men soon brought more varieties.

In these days little trade with the eastern states was possible. Cash income from fur traders was decreasing, but income from the gold mines was big. Farmers could secure some of this gold income by furnishing food to the miners: fresh vegetables, dairy products, bacon, flour and fruit when available. Young Union County had a cash income from the gold of the Panhandle and was producing food for its miners and some to freight to Baker and Boise mines.

Hay from the natural growth of grass was harvested the same fall that emigrants came, to provide feed for their cattle and horses that had brought them across the plains. From that first harvest of the land, each year saw more and more hay put up to

winter the increasing herds of cattle, horses and sheep.

Wild meadow hay, although still an important variety, has decreased in total percentage as the years passed. In the 1890's and 1900's grain hay became



#### LOOKING EAST ACROSS GRANDE RONDE VALLEY

number one in the hay crops. A shortage of wheat during World War I stimulated the production of alfalfa and it became the most important hay crop. Today some hay is shipped out of the county, but the big acreage of this important crop is nearly all fed to local livestock.

#### HORSES:

Horses came to the Blue Mountains a century before the white man; horses pulled part of the covered wagons across the plains, plowed the land, hauled freight and carried men about. The horse and the white man conquered the land together. Horses were on every farm and the farm grew its own horses.

Up until about 1920, when the automobile and tractor became numerous, horses were a cash crop. Farmers sold horses to the U. S. Cavalry, freighters,



**Horses Furnished Power for Field Work**



**BOLTEN & BODMEN WAREHOUSE — LAGRANGE**

Sold most of farm machinery in Union and Wallowa Counties during the days of the horse.

stage lines, loggers, wheat farmers of the Columbia Basin, and for city transportation. Horses were an important cash crop and Union County farmers had good stock of the various breeds.

Modern power and transportation have crowded

the horse into a position as a pet or animal of pleasure. The few animals that are still on farms are raised as saddle animals, yet the county is well adapted to horse production and Union County is still a producer of horses in a modest way.

## CATTLE:

The cow has been referred to as "the foster mother of men", and by reading of the Wagon Train Days this can be understood. Cattle took their place along with horses on farms. Horses gradually took over from cattle the duties of work animals, but the cow furnished dairy products and beef, not to mention leather.

After World War I, the decline in horse population was accompanied by an increase in numbers of cattle and by better bred cattle. Today we not only have more cattle but we have in the county some of the finest herds of both dairy and beef cows.

Markets for cattle, as well as hogs and sheep, were in the mining camps. Then, the railroads came and Portland became the market. In the 1950's local auctions handled most of the livestock grown in the county. Each Thursday hundreds of head of stock are sold at the auction yards of the La Grande Livestock Commission east of La Grande, a very important income to the county.

Year by year more cattle are being fed Union county grain by Union County farmers to bring them to top quality.

## SHEEP:

Sheep came at an early date to provide wool for pioneer homes. As the country settled, bands were ranged in the mountains during the summer and gen-

erally were wintered in the Columbia Basin. About 1900 the sheep industry, which was largely a summer range for Umatilla county, reached its peak. Ranges were being overgrazed and when cattle numbers increased they pushed back the bands of sheep. Today most sheep are in farm flocks.

## WHEAT:

Wheat has usually been the first important crop of new lands. It was here. Wheat was ground in coffee mills for flour. In 1865, when the first burr mill was built by Mr. Woods at the mouth of Mill Canyon in La Grande, the water driven stone could grind 25 barrels of flour in a day. In 1865 S. N. Baker also built a mill at Union. It was 1872 before John Caviness built his flour mill at Island City. Cove, Summerville and North Powder all had mills operating at an early date and before the days of the railroad.



HEADER SCENE ABOUT 1865



Pioneer Flouring Mill  
Island City



Alliance Flouring Mill  
La Grande



STEAM THRESHER IN FIELD OF BOUND WHEAT



BINDING WHEAT



THRESHING HEADED WHEAT



Heading Wheat on Cricket Flat about 1890



HARVESTING WHEAT NEAR ALICEL · 1910

Surplus flour was sold to the mines, and in connection with this Edison Spears of Union tells the following:



MT. FANNY FLOURING MILL — COVE

"The old burr mill at Union did not break out all of the flour in the first run. Each Friday coarse middlings would be rerun. This made a higher protein flour that years later was sold as patented flour. Chinese from Powder River were very quick to detect the superiority of the flour ground on Fridays. No explanation would dissuade them afterwards from insisting that their flour must be ground on Friday."

More wheat was grown than could be sold as flour before the railroad came. It was fed to hogs and the hogs made into bacon for the mine trade. Some of the larger farmers of the north end of the valley raised 200 and 300 head of hogs and butchered them each year. Thus they marketed their wheat as bacon and lard.

The railroad opened a market for export at Portland. For some thirty years there was a wavering balance in price between wheat as whole grain, flour or hogs to ship to Portland. Larger mills in regions

of higher protein wheats gradually dominated much of the flour market. Wheat and hog prices have been shifted off balance by regulations arising from the World Wars and price supports. The ultimate result has been acreage shifted from wheat to barley, a more uneconomical feed crop, and the barley fed to hogs. The hog population has remained nearly even.



**NORTH POWDER FLOURING MILL**

Although the acreage of wheat has decreased, due to wheat allotments and new crops, total yields have not decreased. Better varieties, better machinery and methods, commercial fertilizers and crop rotations have doubled the yield per acre in the past 30 years.

## **FRUIT:**

Besides the fruit trees that Mr. Miller of Union brought to the Valley in the fall of 1862, in 1863, A. I. Gangloff established a nursery on a 40 acre tract where the present Pioneer Park of La Grande is located. Fruit of all kinds did well and year by year more orchards were planted. Dried apples and dried prunes were two products adapted to the mine trade and to long shipment. Cove, Union and Summerville all had fruit dryers. An old report of 1900

states that the Allen fruit drier at Cove shipped 1,000,000 pounds of dried fruit.

In the early 1900's cherry production was booming at Cove and each summer at cherry harvest the community held a "Cherry Fair". They elected a young lady as Queen Ann and a young man as King Bing. This royal couple ruled over the occasion. People came to the Cherry Fair as a major event of the summer.



Top — ALLEN FRUIT DRYER - COVE

Bottom — SMITH - RINEHART DRYER - SUMMERVILLE

Cove was developing a market for fresh cherries. They and Union were shipping cars out over the little Central Railroad of Oregon. Some years later La Grande and Pumpkin Ridge were also in the cherry business. Today cherries are still an important crop. Eight hundred to 1000 tons go each year to a Salem cannery at a steady price. These are produced by the Cove and Union Cherry Growers and the Pump-

kin Ridge Cherry Growers who have orchards from La Grande to Cricket Flat and load their crop at Imbler. Cherries are now the number one fruit crop of the county.



**PICKING CHERRIES**

Apples received much promotion in the early 1900's by a campaign put on by the railroads who wanted the business of shipping them east. The north end of the county saw the most acreage planted. Imbler was the most important shipping point, and was a city of apples in the 1920's and 1930's. Local apples were firm and excellent for export trade. However, modern refrigeration permitted softer, larger and more highly colored apples from warmer irrigated regions to be shipped long distances. The quality was not always as good but the eye appeal was better. Union County commercial apple orchards are largely a thing of the past now.

## **POTATOES:**

In the 1890's and 1900's potatoes were a big commercial crop of the county. Big fields were grown on the Sand Ridge and in the hills of Pumpkin Ridge and Cricket Flat. The long white Burbank potatoes were in demand as bakers.

Irrigated regions like southern Idaho, central Oregon, ect., with their high yields, have dominated the markets. Today the county produces few potatoes.

### SUGAR BEETS:

Sugar beets were introduced into the county after careful study by the State College and others. After several attempts were made to locate a factory in the valley, work actually started on the building of the Amalgamated Sugar Company's building in 1898. Five hundred acres of beets were under contract.



**SUGAR BEET FIELD — J. L. CAVINESS**

### GROWING OF SUGAR BEETS.

Struggle to Establish This Valuable Industry in the Grande Ronde Valley. It Has Been Proven That There is Good Prospects for the Intelligent Farmer.



**SUGAR BEET FACTORY AT LA GRANDE**

Sugar content of local beets was very high, but dry years emphasized and aggravated the lack of irrigation. Also, as later developed, a beet wilt, curley leaf, added to the effect of drouth. Efforts were made to secure irrigation, but they never quite materialized. The outcome was that the crop was not popular because of its much hand labor and rather low yield. In 1912 the buildings were being removed and the Valley lost an industry with a payroll of 1000 people. The present County Shops are in the warehouse of the old sugar factory.

### **GRASS SEED:**

The county is naturally adapted to seed growing because of soil, rainfall and a favorable harvesting season. Farmers had harvested crops of timothy, sweet clover and other seeds, but in 1920 "Jet" Gaskill grew a crop of certified Hybrid 128 Club wheat. The Extension Department recognized the possibilities for seed production in Union County and promoted the industry.



**SOIL CONSERVATIONIST, LARRY WARREN, IN GRASS FIELD**

In 1934 some of the first fields of Ladak alfalfa and Crested Wheat grass were growing in cultivated rows in this county. Oregon State Extension Crop Specialist, E. R. Jackman, gives the county the distinction of being the first in the United States to grow grass seed in rows, to fertilize grass seed with nitrogen, and to lead in the production of creeping red fescue seed for lawns. For several years most of the acreage of Merion Blue Grass was in Union County.

In 1938 there were 2,390 acres of grass and legume seed in the county. By 1956 the acreage had grown to 19,617 and the value of the crop was about \$2,000,000.

As production increased markets needed to be built. In 1935 the Blue Mountain Seed Growers were organized with county agent H. G. Avery as secretary and manager and they developed a big volume of sales, then sold their business to the Pacific Supply Cooperative in 1945. Many other cleaning plants and dealers now operate. Imbler claims, and probably rightfully, to be the present center of the grass seed industry of the United States.

## PEAS:

In the mid-1930's Howard Wagner was experimenting with the production of Austrian winter peas. By the time World War II had made a demand for the seed for a cover crop for southern cotton fields, thousands of acres were in production. Elgin and Imbler in particular were shipping many, many cars at a good price. Other cover crops are now used and local production has practically ceased.

Food demands of World War II also made a market for dry Alaska peas. Machinery and knowledge of Austrian pea production made this crop possible.

Many were grown and limited acreage of Alaskas (possibly 1000 acres) are still grown.

Successful production of Alaskas caused seed companies to start wrinkled pea programs. In 1945 the Associated Seed Company of Hartford, Connecticut put a branch in at Elgin. The California Packing Company built a seed plant at La Grande. One year the Elgin plant shipped \$1,000,000 worth of wrinkled pea seed, but within ten years it was being closed because of weedy fields caused from pea production, and because irrigated Columbia Basin land obtained larger yields.

The La Grande plant has proved a more steady



**PEA CANNERY AT ELGIN**

business and still operates.

Cannery peas followed the seed production. Peas were grown in the Elgin area and canned in Umatilla County. A \$400,000 pea cannery was built at Elgin by Umatilla County capital, but, due probably somewhat to management, it failed to pay and within three years it was closed. However, some 2000 acres of peas are grown year year in the Elgin country and hauled to Weston to be vined and frozen.

## RESEARCH:

In the 1890's there was agitation for a branch Insane Asylum in Eastern Oregon. Union was endeavoring to secure this state institution and the state legislature appropriated money to purchase a 620 acre site. When it was found unconstitutional to locate state institutions outside of Salem, the location was used for a branch agricultural experiment station. Through the years since, the Eastern Oregon Experiment Station has constantly helped solve Union County agricultural problems, along with those of other eastern Oregon counties.



**HERMAN GEER HOP YARD AT COVE BEFORE 1900**

One of many crops that have been grown in a limited way.

Herman Geer was the father of Governor Geer.

Nearly a half century ago, Paul Spillman came to the county as agricultural agent. Through the years he and his successors carried agriculture science directly onto the farms. The grass seed industry and introduction of many other improvements are largely the result of our county agents.

In 1937 the federal government passed a law pro-

viding technical aid to districts organized to care for and conserve our vital soil and water resources. On April 2, 1946, the south part of the county was formed into the First Union Soil Conservation District, and in 1952 the remainder of the county, comprising the old Indian land of Hunaha formed the Elgin Soil Conservation district. Both districts are operating under Larry Warren as federal technician and many long-range conservation practices that will be valuable to the future of the county, are being set up.



EASTERN OREGON EXPERIMENT STATION at UNION



STRIP CROPS IN ELGIN SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## Chapter XI

# Lumbering

### PIONEER USE OF WOOD:

Fortune smiled upon the pioneer who chose to settle in our valleys surrounded by forests. His first buildings were erected with logs. Split wooden shakes nailed to poles made the roof, but the floors were a different problem. Round logs do not make a level floor so he was obliged to hew the logs flat into what he called "puncheons". Puncheon was also used to make doors.

If a saw was available and a really fancy job was desired, planks would be whipsawed. This was done by rolling a log up on a frame where one man above and one below the log could pull the saw up and down to cut off boards.

Forests supplied fence posts, poles and fire wood for cooking food and wood for heating homes was brought each year from the forest. Many homes after a hundred years still burn wood for fuel.

During the first 30 years of settlement many, many millions of board feet of red fir and "tamarack" logs, especially the tamarack, were split into fence rails to build the hundreds of miles of rail fence that fenced the new farms. Six thousand four hundred rails are required to build one mile of fence. Each 10 ft. rail contains about 12 board feet of wood; roughly 75,000 board feet of timber were used to build a mile of fence.

### FIRST SAWMILLS:

Soon after settlement sawmills were built. They

were a water-driven version of the whipsaw, in that power from a waterwheel pulled a saw up and down through a log to cut the boards. One early mill hand described the duties of the sawyer thus: "He set the log on the carriage and started it moving against the saw, then sat down to read the paper while it very, very slowly traveled past the saw". This is probably an exaggeration, but it could be nothing but very slow with some of the small streams of water that were used. At least it was faster and easier than the whipsaw.

Volume III, page 793, of a *Centennial History of Oregon* in speaking of A. B. Davis, one of the owners of the Mountain View Stock Farm, says "He was



**GALLOWAY MILL ON GORDON CREEK - 1887**

united in marriage in 1893 to Miss Rhoda Riggs . . . Reuben Riggs, her paternal grandfather, came to Oregon in 1851 and located in Powder Valley, being one of the earliest settlers of that district. He built the first sawmill in northeastern Oregon, located on the North Powder River". Living residents state that

there was a very early mill on the Union County side of the North Powder River, but have no knowledge that would fix a date.

In 1862, Charles Fox, for whom Fox Hill was named, built a sawmill at Oro Dell. In fact one of the men who worked at this mill named the place from the Greek word "oros" meaning mountain and the English word word "dell", nook in the mountain.

In 1865 H. W. Oliver was operating a mill about two miles north of Summerville on what came to be known as Mill Creek. Some time in the 1860's Hasbrooks built a mill six miles above Union on Catherine Creek. Scattered over the county mills were built as lumber was needed.

## SALMON AS A BY-PRODUCT:

Modern mills are alert to market by-products for an increase in net revenue. They can hardly expect to attain one goal reached by an early Union mill. A certain man installed a water driven sawmill on Catherine Creek, just a little below where the present library building in Union now stands. Logs were run down the creek and impounded above a dam where he secured his power. This dam was an effective barrier for the salmon coming up the creek and he built a trough to store them in. Fish and game laws of today were unknown then, but stories have come down "through the grape vine" of boys stealing the sawmill's salmon, somewhat as boys have been known to steal watermelons.

## STEAM POWER AND CIRCULAR SAWS:

In 1863 Joseph Palmer and J. A. McWirtter built a sawmill in the hills just south of La Grande. Although it operated a very short time before they mov-

ed it to the Idaho mines it is supposed to be the first mill in the county to have had a circular saw and to have been driven with a steam engine.

From time to time other mills of this type were



TYPICAL CIRCULAR SAW MILL OF 1900

built even though many up-and-down mills continued to be built and operated. Securing the machinery for a steam mill was no small item as can be understood from the following story told by Clement McKinnis:

"Father, John McKinnis, bought a sawmill and set it up on Gordon Creek north of where Elgin now stands in 1881. He ordered this mill from Staver and Walker in Portland, and it was shipped from the east coast to them around the Horn. From Portland it was shipped by boat up the Columbia to Umatilla Landing. To bring it from Umatilla he sent two teams, a four horse team to haul the mill and a three yoke of oxen to bring the engine. He considered the engine too heavy for horses to bring over the Tollgate road so he sent oxen for it. After waiting at Umatilla for six weeks for the boat the drivers returned and later went back for the mill.

"We children were too young to care for the stock and do the chores on the farm, which is the

same one my nephew, John McKinnis, now owns on Willow Creek, and father walked home each night after the mill closed and back again in the morning. That was a good six miles as 'the crow flies', but the country is so rough he could not follow the crow much of the way."

The coming of the railroad in 1884 and the completion of the branch line to Elgin six years later opened the forests of the county to the lumber markets. The little steam driven sawmill reached its greatest numbers about 1900 when it was estimated there were about 50 such mills well scattered through the forests. The April 16, 1908 issue of the Elgin Leader lists 17 mills that were hauling lumber to Elgin.

## LOG DRIVES:

In 1890 the Smith-Stanley Lumber Company acquired timber in the upper Grande Ronde watershed and built a larger mill at Perry. This was the first mill in the county equipped with a band saw. Logs had been floated down Catherine Creek to mills at



**WINTER LOGGING**

Union and a few other places in small amounts, but this was an operation where each year some 20,000,000 feet of logs cut in the hills around Starkey and tribu-

tary streams above were hauled to the streams and floated down to Perry to be sawed.

All logs were brought to landings along the stream with horses. The shorter hauls, up to about two miles, were made in the summer time by placing one end of the log on a low two-wheeled cart known as a "spool cart". Longer hauls of as far as seven or eight miles, were made in the winter on sleds when there was snow.

At Perry a dam was built on the river to catch the logs and an artificial lake built to store them. On the upper river "splash dams" were built to store a body of water and then turn it loose to raise the stream flow for a few hours. One "splash dam" was at the mouth of Fly Creek and one near Beaver Creek.

In the spring when the streams were high the decks would be broken and the logs rolled into the stream. "Splash" floods would carry them down. Many lodged in the turns of the river and between floods men would have to get them back into the river. There were so many bushes and obstructions for the logs to hang up on that the whole operation was a tedious job of hard work where men worked day after day in the ice cold water. A drive would likely last a month or more before all the logs were safely at the mill.

Men who made these drives followed such jobs as a business. They were almost 100 percent single men with an unwritten code of honor to finish any drive they started. These men, known as "lumberjacks", were highly skilled, they worked hard, played hard and drank hard. When the drive was over and they received their pay, which they called their "stake", the standard procedure was to start for town, dressed in their work clothes and hobnailed shoes, for they never owned but one set of clothing. At town

they would have one big hilarious time of whiskey, women and song, until their stake was gone. Then broke and almost empty handed they would "hit" the road to find another job.

## RAILROAD LOGGING:

About 1900 C. W. Nibley and George E. Stoddard purchased the Perry Mill and it became known



**STODDARD MILL AT PERRY**

as the Grande Ronde Lumber Company. In 1906 railroads were built into the Starkey area and logs were hauled on the train to the mill. This was the beginning of a new method of logging, and the old log drives were on their way out. Also it was to start a change in the method of the life of the lumberjack. Men were more inclined to work steady for the same employer, more of them were married men, the big bunk houses gave way to homes at a logging camp and schools found a place in the lumber camps.

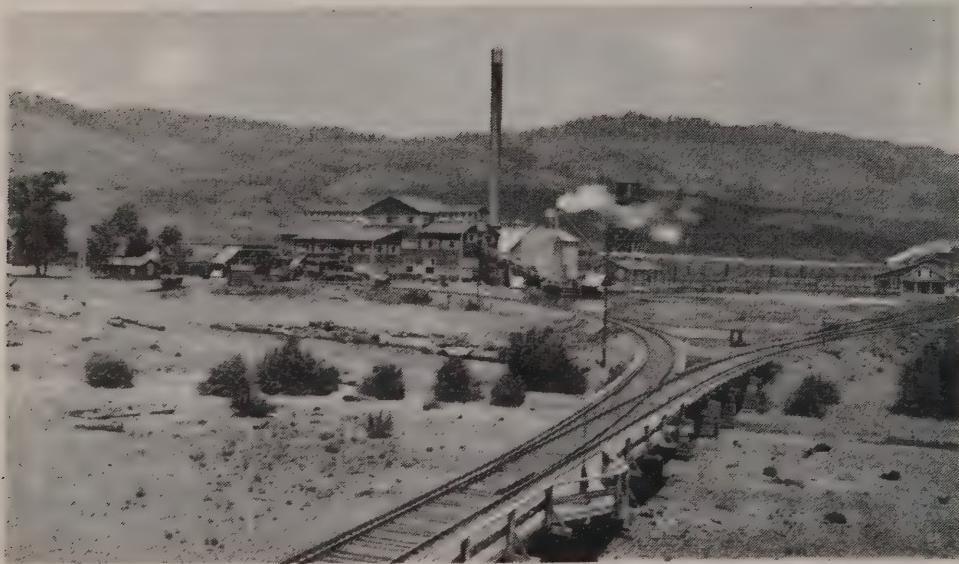
In 1926 the Perry mill was moved to Pondosa.

The story of the town of Pondosa tells what happened to it there.

The story of another bandsaw mill, the Palmer



**PONDOSA MILL AT ELGIN — NOW CLOSED**



**PALMER MILL AT LA GRANDE — ABOUT 1912**

Mill of La Grande, is partly told in the town of Palmer Valley. After the logs were hauled from Palmer Valley a spur was built east of Vincent on the Wal-

Iowa River and approximately an equal amount of logs were taken from the Smith Mountain region of Wallowa County. Thus, before the Palmer mill was dismantled, it had sawed roughly a half billion feet of timber that was hauled some 40 to 60 miles by railroad to the mill from the lower Grande Ronde.

In 1910, August J. Stang came to La Grande and commenced purchasing pine timber. By November 30, 1925, the first log was cut at his mill, the Mt. Emily Lumber Company. In 1927 they purchased the holdings of the Grande Ronde Lumber Company and built more railroad to the woods. In 1930 a headquarters camp was established on Meadowbrook Creek. From this camp logging was carried on in the Upper Grande Ronde, upper Meadow and Bear creeks, and on Camas Creek as far as Ukiah. At one time they were using some 50 miles of private railroad.

## LOG TRUCKS:

By 1925 tractors were introduced into the woods for skidding logs short distances to landings. Their use increased and that of horses decreased for the next 30 years when the horse was no longer used. Following the use of tractors came the log truck, first used by Mt. Emily in 1932 to haul logs to the railroad spurs. Trucks went into scattered pieces of timber farther and farther from the railroad, and hauled longer distances. In 1955 the Mt. Emily Lumber Company was purchased by the Valsetz Lumber Company, and rather than make repairs to the railroads they changed over completely to trucks, which hauled logs direct from the distant woods to the mill at La Grande.

In 1929 Hanford Reed of Elgin moved a bandsaw mill from Ladd Canyon to Elgin. He built a rail-

road spur and shipped logs in, but also used trucks for direct haul quite early and was depending upon truck transportation some 15 years before Mt. Emily abandoned their railroads. Reed sold his cut to the



**HOME OF LOGGERS IN WINTER TIME**



**BATES MILL AT LOOKING GLASS**

Pondosa plant at Elgin. The sawmill was sold to the Heppner Lumber Company in 1952 and it burned to the ground in 1954.

In the 1930's lumber operations at Union shifted to a locally owned band mill of some ten million board feet per year capacity, the Oregon Trail Lumber Company, which continues to operate. A second mill of

similar size, the Ronde Valley Lumber Co., has been built within recent years.

Other small mills operate in the county, but their numbers have gradually decreased.

## SPECIALTY PRODUCTS:

Cabinet shops and small operators have used local wood in manufacturing items. Mills have sawed lumber for special purposes from time to time. Mt. Emily in La Grande has made furniture and other wood products as sidelines.

Bill Moore built a wood factory at Elgin and sold his first order in May, 1925. He made a wide variety of specially shaped and glued products, Venetian blinds being one of his specialties. His plant, known as the Ponderosa Pine Lumber Company, prospered and gained an enviable reputation during the years of hard times. In 1943, ill health compelled Mr. Moore to sell his large plant and retire until his death a year later. Without the guiding hand of Moore the plant changed hands several times and is now dismantled.

In 1953 the Western Stud Mill was started in El-



**BIG PINE LOG**

gin as a small plant. Year to year it has grown. Today it has a single shift capacity of 25,000,000 board feet of precision cut 8 ft. studs.

### CHIPS:

New paper mills in the Pasco area of the Columbia have made a market for wood chips. As a by-product, both the Western Stud Mill and Mt. Emily bark their logs before sawing and convert all slabs and edgings into chips. Each sends several railroad cars of chips to the paper mill every day.



MT. EMILY LUMBER CO. AT LA GRANDE

### TREE FARMS:

Conservation practices in forestry are coming to public attention. Logging our forests on a sustained yield is being advocated by the industry. The old conception of the virgin forest as something to be harvested like ore in a mine, is being replaced with the idea that trees are just an agricultural crop like any other crop. Many forest owners, both small and

large, have joined the "Tree Farm" movement, wherein they set as a goal the continuous production of trees of their land. Many scientific methods of aiding tree growth are being used. Mt. Emily owns the largest acreage of tree farm land in the county, some 50,000 acres. Sustained yield harvest will mean a constant, steady lumber harvest.

## **Chapter XII**

# *Recreation*

### **BACKGROUND:**

The features of the Grande Ronde Valley that made it a land of summer recreation before the coming of the white man are here today. The cool summer days, the miles of forest covered hills with creeks of clear water filled with trout, the lush grass meadows where deer and elk graze, the beautiful wild flowers, the rugged mountains of the east end of our county, and the numerous clear, cold springs, remain today.



**THE FIRST SPORTSMEN**

### **SNOW AND WATER SPORTS:**

White man's good highways have made it possible to use the area for winter sports. The many sunny winter days, the absence of severe blizzards

experienced on the prairies, and modern protection against cold, have caused ski lovers to take their hickory slats, follow a snow free highway to some mountain resort, and ski over the white, clean outdoors.

The need of preserving the clean water that flows in abundance in the spring has caused white men to build reservoirs. Some of these have been built in Union County and some more are prospected. As soon as such man made lakes are available, sportsmen interested in boating, water skiing, and fishing, will convert these lakes into resort areas. Union County has many such lakes in prospect.

## HUNTING AND FISHING:

The first homesteaders were obliged to depend largely upon wild game for their meat. Abundant wild life supplied their needs until the population grew large and people became careless and wasted game. To prevent extermination of animals and birds, soon after the turn of the century, stringent game laws



**COW ELK OF THE NATIVE STOCK**

Taken before they were depleted  
were passed and the Oregon Game Commission came  
into being.

Prairie chickens, that were numerous in the north

end of the county and the sage hens of the south part of the county were almost exterminated. Grouse were greatly reduced. All prairie chickens did vanish, but the others were barely saved. Grouse are gradually building back. The Game Commission has also introduced some new game birds: Chinese pheasants, Hungarian partridges and Chuckar partridges.

Big game suffered in like manner. Deer became very scarce and elk were virtually all gone, gone to the point where new stock was shipped in from Wyoming and carefully protected until they multiplied. Today hundreds of sportsmen come from western Oregon and other places to camp in the mountains of Union County during the hunting season in October and November and hunt big game. At this time of year our highways are lined with jeeps, trailer houses and various camping equipment as visitors come for the fall hunt.



#### SALMON HATCHERY

Built along the Wallowa River in 1904 and operated for a few years

Commercial fisheries and sportsmen thinned the salmon run in our streams. The Indian had his own game conservation programs that were effective, but white men paid little attention to them. When the

game Commission took over they also built fish hatcheries and replenished the streams with trout. Now it is taken for granted that young fish must be planted in streams to maintain the present take of thousands of fishermen. People who work inside thoroughly enjoy a quiet day on a mountain stream fishing. Union County has many ideal fishing streams to entice the visitor and offer recreation for the resident.



#### FISH HATCHERY AT UNION

Now no longer in use.

### CAMPING:

In the chapter on Wagon Trains we referred to the first settlers going huckleberrying. This was a common practice that has continued down through the years. Native huckleberries are a much sought after fruit, and nearly every season our mountains abound in them. A huckleberry trip to the mountains makes an ideal vacation. It may be a one day trip with picnic dinner, or many times the whole family goes and camps for a few days. With some folks the chance to go camping is far more important than the berries that might be brought home.

If one needs an excuse to go camping, gathering

mushrooms can be the incentive at seasons when the berries are not ripe. The morel and cauliflower varieties are common along brushy river bottoms and old burns.

"The mountains of the Northwest are tangled, wild, remote and high. They have the roar of torrents and avalanches in their throats . . . Here man can find deep solitude, and under conditions of grandeur that are startling he can come to know both himself and God." Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas wrote these lines at a time when he was a regular summer visitor to the Wallowa Mountains, and though in one sweep he included the great Pacific Northwest, his phrases aptly describe, and he no doubt had in mind his beloved Wallowas, part of which are in Union County.

The east end of the county reaches into the Wallowas to include not only China Cap, the center of the United States, but Eagle Cap, nearly 10,000 feet high, the center of the Wallowas, the hub from which streams flow in all directions. Union County claims Benson Glacier on the east side of Eagle Cap, the big-



**GLACIER LAKE AT THE FOOT OF BENSON GLACIER  
and EAGLE CAP**

gest glacier of the range, and beautiful Glacier Lake at its foot. Among the deep canyons and crags of Upper Eagle Creek, Catherine Creek and Minam drainages, crystal jewels in the form of lakes are set in the forest covered hills where glaciers some 20,000 years ago carved their beds. Glacier, Eagle, Trav- ers, Echo, Tombstone and Diamond lakes, some of the best known lakes of the Wallowas, are also in Union County.

Indians in their wisdom born of countless centuries of experience selected the area now encompassed in Union County as a land for recreation. White men have concurred with their selection and expect it to be always a revered land of peace, plenty, romance and sport.

## Chapter XIII

# Carry On

The size of this book prohibits more than mentioning the highlights of past happenings within the county. The Historical Society has manuscripts of more detailed accounts of many subjects, and earnestly desires people to file others before time blots them from the memory of man. We feel that if you will pursue the knowledge of your country you will better appreciate it and the sturdy people who made it what it is. This will give you an understanding background to do greater things in the future.

Material in the preceding chapters is briefly told; many things are not even mentioned. Just a few are mentioned as follows to open the door for further reading:

From the early evangelist in a tent or a school house has developed strong congregations of many denominations of churches meeting in splendid buildings.

Instead of the pioneer grave out in the field we now have beautifully cared for and publicly financed cemeteries.

Cultural organizations have come through the old literary society and Chautauqua and to many kinds of service clubs. Fraternities and lodges have kept pace.

The building of railroads and highways has been told. Other forces speeded communication. Railroads brought the telegraph; within ten more years the telephone followed. By 1900 rural people were installing telephones. Isolation was vanishing. Today we take for granted that almost anyone in the county can be

reached by phone. 1920 saw radio enter the county, and soon the most isolated resident could listen to far away cities. Since 1928 we have had our own KLBM radio station at La Grande to listen to as well as many distant stations. The forest service as well as many private business firms have individual radio systems to talk to their trucks and branch operations. Television followed after radio. Translators and cables in the county now permit any resident to receive at least three television stations quite clearly.

In the 1890's water power driven generators were being installed to furnish electric lights for the towns. Soon they were powered by saw mill engines and even complete steam plants. Larger hydroelectric plants were installed, and by 1915 the Eastern Oregon Light and Power Company was building across the county and furnishing reliable continuous electric service. Today we are connected with the power network of the entire northwest, and practically every home uses electricity not only for lights, but also for countless sources of heat and power. Our shops and mills are electrically driven.

The country doctor and dentist of days gone by now has much technical equipment, and in many cases works with other members of his profession in clinics. La Grande has two very modern hospitals. Diseases and injuries that were fatal are now cured as a matter of routine.

At the present time four newspapers are being published in the county, three weeklies and one daily. Only 23 publications in the state are older than the Union Republic which was established in 1888. The Elgin Recorder has appeared every week since 1891. Our daily, the La Grande Observer, has published since 1896. The Eastern Oregon Review of La Grande was started in 1931.

The fountain from which the story of a land

springs is the people who live there. People living in the shadows of the Blue Mountains, people seasoned by the wagon train trip to Oregon, and people welded together from many regions and ideals, have given Union county a heritage of aggressive persistence and integrity of character. If we were to point out the guiding individuals who developed our community, we would be sure to leave some unmentioned. Rather than attempt such an enumeration, let us point out just a few examples to start the reader thinking along this line. He will discover a long list of wonderful people who have lived in Union county.

How interesting it would be if we could go back through the centuries and know of the great deeds of Indian men and women when they roamed these hills. On the other hand, do we fully appreciate the dozens of faculty members of Eastern Oregon College, highly trained local residents, whose life work and goal is the betterment of humanity rather than the seeking of dollars.



**T. T. GEER of Cove  
Governor of Oregon  
1899 - 1903**



**WALTER M. PIERCE  
of Island City  
Governor of Oregon —1923-1927**

Many years ago there lived at Cove a man by the name of T. T. Geer. In 1898 he was elected Gov-

ernor of Oregon. The reader might like to go to the library and read his story, "Fifty Years in Oregon".

Again in 1922 a Union county man was elected Governor. Ths time it was Walter Pierce, a long time resident of Grande Ronde Valley who had taken part in many local affairs, a widely known orator who many times said he learned public speaking during years of attendance at Blue Mountain Grange near La Grande. Pierce served as congressman for 10 years after his term as Governor.

James H. Slater was a member of the Territorial Legislature and of the first State Legislature, then moved to Union County where he continued to reside and practice law for the remainder of his life. James

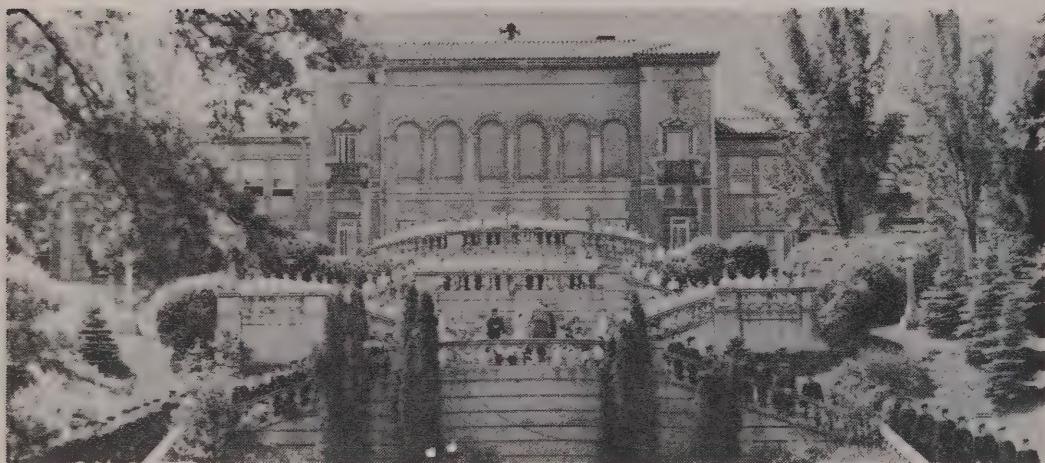


**SENATOR JAMES HARVEY SLATER**

James H. Slater served in the Territorial Legislature of Oregon before moving to Union County. After moving to La Grande he served as congressman for the 2nd district of Oregon from 1871-1873, and U. S. Senator from 1879-1885. On his way to Washington, D.C., he stopped at Huntington on November 24, 1883 and gave the address at the driving of the last spike in the railroad to the northwest.

H. Slater of La Grande was elected to the United States Senate where he served from 1879 to 1885.

Dr. William T. Phy, the surgeon, and his development of Hot Lake into a famous hospital is an interesting story. Likewise, the DeMoss family of musicians from Cove who traveled over America and Europe on concert tours. Harry Avery, long time county agricultural agent, and dynamic Howard Wagner, played their part in establishing the grass seed industry here. The story of how Bill Moore built a successful wood products factory on borrowed capital during the depression of the 1930's is an interesting one.



#### EASTERN OREGON COLLEGE at LA GRANDE

Union County was settled by graduates of the "College of the Wagon Train", who in turn built the "College of the Mountaineer" (EOC) to train their sons and daughter. We invite the reader to become acquainted with men and women who have lived and those who do live in Union County.

## Chapter XIV

# Schools

Before the introduction of the many modern aids to transportation and communication the school house was the true community center. People could not whisk away, regardless of weather, to spend an evening at the movies, social club, dance or meeting in La Grande. There was no television, radio or telephone. Newspapers were scarce and would often remain at the post office, maybe miles away, until some day it would become possible to make a trip there. The traditional little red school house, which in Union County was probably a log cabin, rough board house or white, rustic covered building was, because of isolation, the hub of community activity.

The following excerpt from a two column account in the Weekly Eastern Oregon Republican for December 29, 1892, describing "Christmas at Telocaset" is indicative of some of the school-house-centered activities. We quote:

"The Christmas tree, literary exercises, supper and dance held at the Telocaset school house last Saturday eve was a grand success and an event that will long be remembered by our people. There was plenty of good things for everybody. No one was forgotten. The tree was a sight to behold. It fairly groaned under its burden of offerings to friends and relatives, sweethearts and wives. Everybody, especially the children, for miles around received presents and tokens of regard and love. The music, singing, and literary exercises were above the average . . . The singing by the choir, which consisted of Mrs. W. H. Huffman, Mrs. Rosa Herbert, Miss Clara Yowell, Mrs. McConnell Miss Etta Huffman and Jay Dobbins with

Mrs. Brownlow Chancey as organist was a source of delight to the audience. There were many excellent songs sung. The song entitled "Only a Picture of Her Boy," by Mrs. Rosa Herbert was magnificently rendered. There was a death-like quiet among the people while this beautiful song was sung, which is the highest compliment a singer can receive from an audience, followed at its completion by encores and storms of applause . . . "

Then followed an account of near disaster as an overturned lamp threatened the party and the building itself as the flames spread. The story continued: "For a short time it looked as though our fine new school house would go up in smoke. However, at last the fire was extinguished by men beating it out with their coats. It was a close call but did not stop the festivities long. On the contrary it seemed to liven everybody up and the revel went merrily on. When I left the building at midnight the fun waxed fast and furious and the dancers held the floor. The building shook with revelry and good cheer, and merry voices and light-hearted laughter rang out on the air, while the band played Annie Laurie, and the wind went howling by."

The teacher was usually somewhat of a community leader. Nearly everyone attended school programs which were given intermittently through the year, the last day of school often consisting of recitations, dialogues, and songs by the pupils, followed by a community picnic lunch and, at times, sporting events or races.

Business meetings were usually held in the school house. Many granges met at school houses until they could build halls. Union Sunday Schools, church services and singing schools were often held there. Box and pie socials, literary society programs and other welfare projects often raised funds for the improve-

ment of the school, the building or the grounds. People had a clannish kinship to everyone else who belonged to the district. They faced their problems, lived and played together.

In pioneer days there actually existed as many communities as there were schools in the county. This chapter will merely number and name most of the districts and describe only a few as representative of the whole. The date listed does not pretend, in many instances, to be the date of the organization of the district, but is the first date on file in the county office describing the legal boundaries of the districts. Records of School District Number One, dated 8 February 1868, state "there are no records of the boundaries of School Dist. No. 1 and no record of who have filled the offices of Said District . . . on the first Monday in April 1867 a Meeting of the Voters of the So Called School District No. 1 was held at which time the minutes allege that J. H. Stevens and R. H. Mallory were Elected Directors and S. M. Grandy clerk. This is the first date that Committee (of investigation) have to work from."

Dist- rict*	Name	Date of Boundary Recording	Dist- rict	Name	Date of Boundary Recording
1	La Grande .....	1882	20	Wolf Creek .....	1890
2	Mt. Carmel .....	1890	21	Chumos .....	1903
3	Iowa .....	1882	22	Hilgard .....	1889
4	Shanghai .....	1889	23	Elgin .....	1882
5	Union .....	1889	24	Catherine Creek .....	1889
6	Side Hill - Pleasant Grove .....	1887	25	Medical Springs .....	1890
7	Moss Chapel .....	1882	26	Pondosa .....	
8	North Powder .....	1882	27	Pine Grove .....	1890
9	Lower Cove .....	1882	28	Fruitdale .....	1890
10	Island City .....	1882	30	Mt. Glenn .....	1903
11	Imbler .....	1884	31	Gordon Creek .....	1885
12	Riverview .....	1888	32	Telocaset .....	1890
13	Summerville .....	1882	33	Pyle Canyon .....	
14	Indian Creek .....	1881	34	Ramo Flat .....	1890
15	Cove .....	1881	35	North High Valley .....	1882
16	Frosty .....	1889	36	Hindman .....	1882
17	Dry Creek .....	1887	37	Clover Creek .....	1888
18	Liberty .....	1890	38	The Park .....	1882
19	Ladd Canyon .....	1890	39	Upper Ladd Canyqn ..	1882

Dist- rict	Name	Date of Boundary Recording	Dist- rict	Name	Date of Boundary Recording
40	Valley Center	1887	60	Kamela	1889
41	Willow Creek	1882	61	Willowdale	1890
42	Fox Hill	1889	62	Antelope - Haller	1890
43	Valeria	1889	63	Annexed to Baker Co.	
44	Pumpkin Ridge	1882	64	Darr	1890
45	Cunningham	1882	65	Perry	1890
46	Alicel	1882	66	Annexed to Baker Co.	
47	Annexed to Baker Co.		67	Rysdam	1891
48	Rock Creek	1890	68	Annexed to Baker Co.	
49		1886	69	South High Valley	1892
50	Annexed to Baker Co.		70	Annexed to Baker Co.	
51	Thorny Grove	1882	71	Palmer Junction	1893
52	Starkey	1887	72	Hempe	1894
53	Jimmy Creek	1888	73	Annexed to Wallowa Co.	
54	Annexed to Baker Co.		74	Annexed to Baker Co.	
55	Annexed to Baker Co.		75	Annexed to Baker Co.	
56	Lone Star	1884	76	Bills	1899
57	Annexed to Baker Co.		77	Ryder	1901
58	Annexed to Baker Co.		78	South Imbler	1911
59	Fairview	1890			

## MT. GLEN DISTRICT NO. 28:

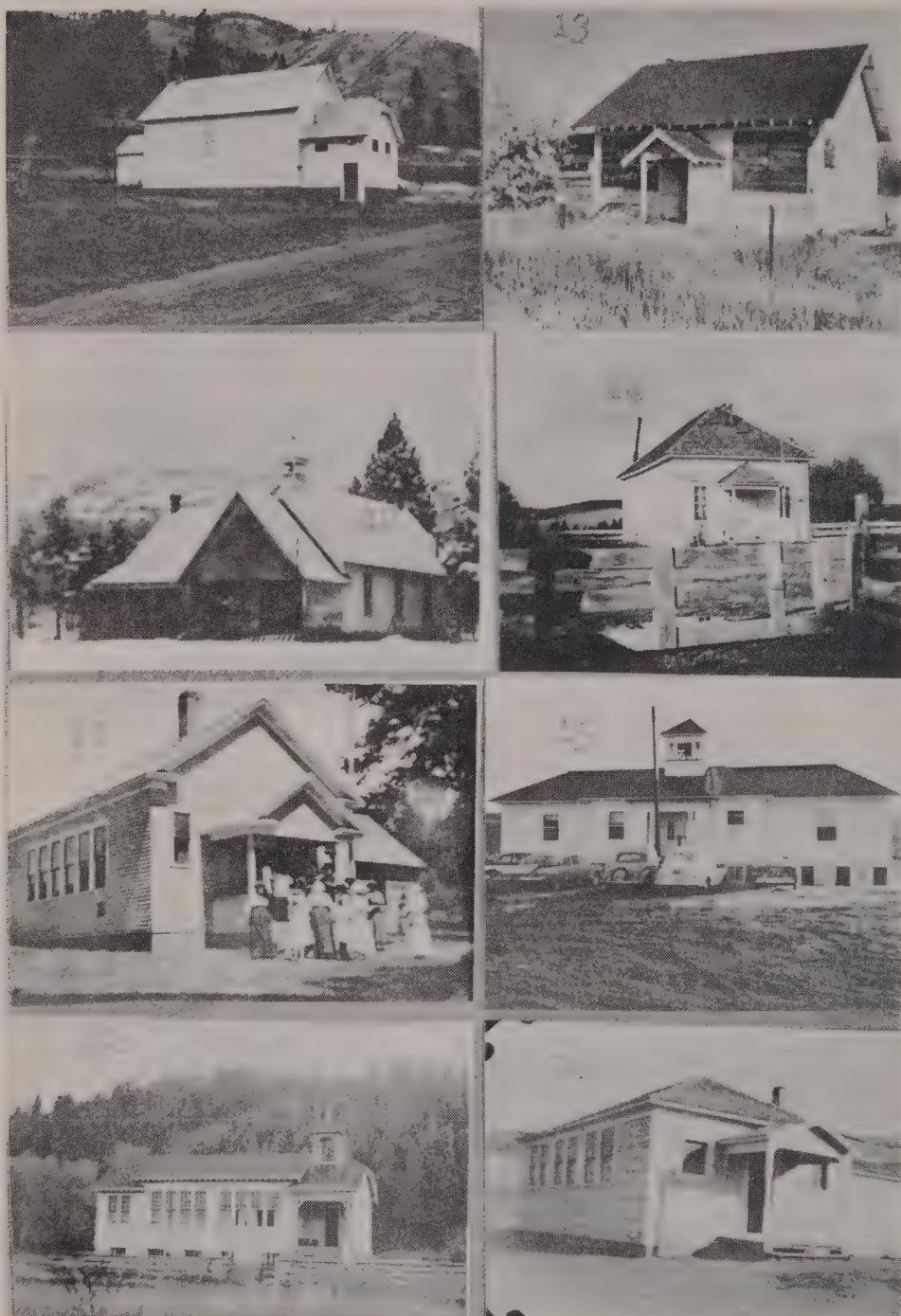
By the turn of the century a number of families belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had settled in the Mt. Glen area. Prior to 1903 they had conducted a private school in their meeting house, but since they believed in public education they joined in a petition for a district in their immediate locality.

Mr. E. D. Whiting, who still resides at the Glen, tells how he, Mr. Killpack and Mr. Tucker went to Union to present their request. Mr. McCall from the Moss Chapel district whom they had expected as a companion in their cause, was unable to appear. Mr. Whiting says:

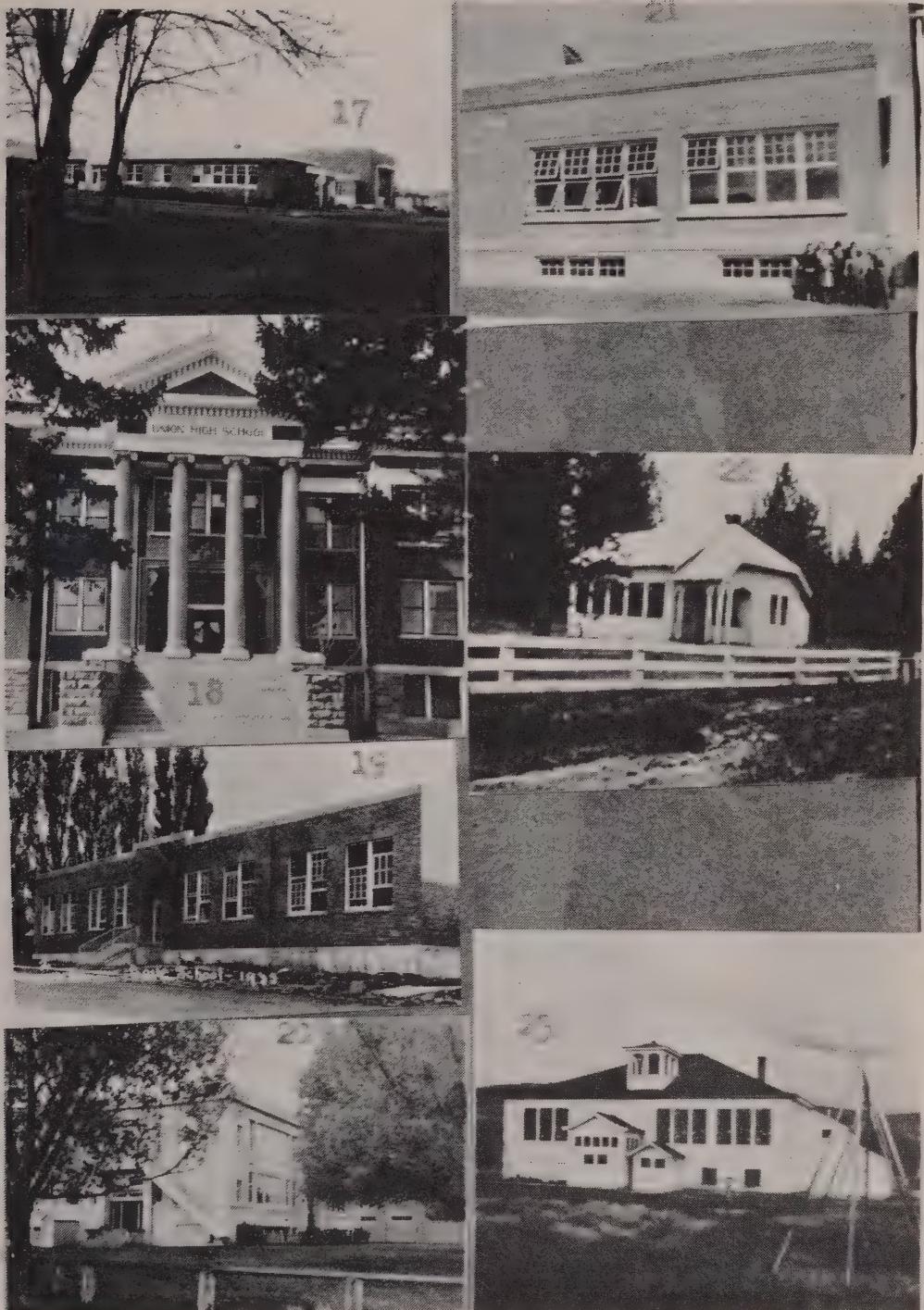
"Mr. Wm. Hunter and Mr. Fred Holmes were at Union with a large list of names (remonstrances) against us. We parleyed and contended for some time over the boundary lines and finding ourselves under thumb screws were compelled to give up to our opponents in nearly every point. We were listened to

**A FEW SCHOOLHOUSES DURING THE CENTURY**

(1) Fairview "Brush Chapel" district number 59; (2) Bills No. 76; (3) Kamela No. 60; (4) Baker (Elgin) No. 23; (5) Ramo Flat No. 34; (6) Iowa No. 3; (7) Mt. Glen No. 28 (8) Antelope "Haller" No. 62.

**A FEW SCHOOLHOUSES DURING THE CENTURY**

- (9) Perry No. 65; (10) Pleasant Grove "Side Hill No. 6;  
(11) The Park No. 38; (12) Hilgard No. 22; (13) Willowdale No.  
61; (14) Mt. Carmel No. 2; (15) Telocaset No. 31; (16) Cather-  
ine Creek No. 24.

**A FEW SCHOOLHOUSES DURING THE CENTURY**

(17) Stella Mayfield (Elgin) No. 23; (18) Union No. 5; (19)  
Cove No. 15; (20) Powder Valley No. 8; (21) Wolf Creek No.  
20; (22) Palmer Junction No. 71; (23) Medical Springs Ponds  
No. 25.

by the board and secured a small district . . . running from a corner of Holmes farm, taking in 80 acres of said farm. L. R. Perry's, S. W. Andrew's, J. S. Jerry's, E. L. Whiting's, Peter Allen's, the Morrison place, Hyrum William's and the section west of Mt. Glen to the top of the mountain. By far the smallest district in the county."

There was still no school house. A dwelling house was rented and used for three or four years until the structure now owned by Leo Waite was built. Some pupils who had formerly attended school in the Iowa and Moss Chapel districts now enrolled at Mt. Glen. School was discontinued in 1945 and the district has since consolidated with La Grande.

### **DRY CREEK DISTRICT NO. 17:**

Mr. Burt Oliver, reared and schooled and still residing in the Dry Creek District, speaks warmly of the school as a public school, a spelling school and its "chase the squirrel" spelling bees, a Sunday School and as a center for the literary society with its plays and programs. As fifty of its hundred young people of school age were enrolled in 1882, we can realize that the teacher during that seven and one-half month term had a lively time and undoubtedly earned the \$294 pay received.

The date of the earliest school is not known but in 1876 the clerk of the district was ordered to post notices "for the purpose of levying a tax of \$35.00 to repair the Schoolhouse". The vote for the tax was unanimous and the total portioned out to the taxpay-  
ers in amounts varying from sixty-two cents to \$5.75.

In 1885 a contract was let to "build, complete, finish in workmanlike manner a District Schoolhouse (on land secured from A. J. Colt) as follows: Lay foundation and erect a house Forty six feet long by

Thirty feet wide and seventeen feet high with eight windows 4 on each side 1 door in center of north end. And blackboards across the south end from window to window and a Stage five feet wide by Six inches high across the South end of the floor. And make forty seats (these have been recalled as double ones.). And give the house two coats of paint, inside and out, And build two privies, and lay walk to fence and make stiles over fence . . . For the consideration of \$300. All material to be furnished by the District and all lumber dressed that need be, ready for the square and saw."

The total cost of the school house and fencing totaled \$1052.69. Social "hops" were given to help pay for chandeliers and extra fittings.

In 1886 two teachers were employed.

Improvements were made as time went on, — new seats, Waterbury heating system, new window blinds, extension of school terms, new woodshed, hitching rack, drilled well, studies beyond the eighth grade, etc. At the annual school meeting in June 1925 a union high school district was formed with Imbler. The last session was held in 1944-45 and the district soon consolidated with Imbler.

## ANTELOPE, DISTRICT NO. 62:

The following story of this district has been provided by Mr. Harold Haller, now of Enterprise.

District No. 62, known as Antelope district was originally housed in a log cabin on land donated by Thomas Boyd. This land is now part of Mike Asper's ranch . . . Pat Connaly and my father, I. L. Haller, were two of the original directors of district No. 62. School terms at this time were three months — September, October, and November. The boundaries were from the railroad bridge below the railroad tun-

nel between Telocaset and North Powder, up the railroad track for eight miles, then east to the head of Beagle Creek, then down to Powder River and up the river to the starting point.

About 1900 the eastern end of the district began to fill up with homesteaders and their families, and the need to have the school house more centrally located became acute. After a bitter fight a new school house was built in a new location where it remained until the district was abandoned. The building originally had four windows on each side, no porch, no cloak room, and was heated by a round cast iron heater with a flat top that we would put our lunches on at morning recess and have a warm lunch at noon. This was later replaced with a stove that was encircled with a piece of metal with an air intake that went through the wall to bring in fresh air, heat it, and circulate it through the room. This did quite well but took up a lot of space and ruined our lunch warming. About this time the idea came out that all light in a school room should come from the left side, so all windows on the right side were taken out and an additional window put in the left side, an ante-room was built on the front for hanging clothes and removal of overshoes and such; also a barn was built that could shelter about ten head of horses as many of the children had to ride as far as seven miles each way.

As to outhouses, they were the standard of the times, two two-holers, one for the girls and one for boys. Drinking water was dipped from a spring in the bank of the creek just a few feet from the school boundary. District No. 62 became known as the Haller District in the 30's when two of the directors, the teacher, and two of the three pupils were all Hallers.

Nineteen hundred-seventeen was the last year of the three-months terms. There was a six month term in

1908 and 1909. Nine months school started in 1910 and continued through the last school in 1927. The district was dissolved and divided between districts 25 and 31 in 1929.

## BILLS, DISTRICT NO. 76:

This district is located in the extreme northeast corner of the Cricket Flat country. In 1898 the Bills family and the Barnes family came into the country and settled. Since there was some good timber in that area, mills located there. The mills encouraged homesteaders, and homesteaders meant the need for a school.

In 1899 the residents of the mill community donated logs and hauled them to the mill. Then all went and operated the mill, sawing them into the lumber from which they built their school house. An oyster supper and a cake sale were held to raise money to buy windows and a door for the building. Thus, the school house itself had not cost the patrons any cash, taxes, or bonded indebtedness.

Deep winter snows made it difficult for children to travel back and forth to school so, as in many other settlements, school was not held during the bad weather.

Within a few years the mills had finished their run close by, and as there was not very much tillable land in the Bills district, the population diminished. About 1907 or 1908 there were no longer enough children to continue the school, and the house stood a vacant reminder of days past when the cross-cut saw, the axe, the logging teams, and the hum of the saw-mill made a background for the laughter and play of the children who studied there.

## UNION, DISTRICT NO. 5:

The story of District No. 5 is presented as an example of those which eventually emerged as high schools. Here, as in other areas, subscription schools were the forerunners, the companions, and continuances of public schools and were taught where the students were available.

Mr. A. N. Busick, a pioneer of 1862, left the following information concerning early schools, both public and subscription.

In 1864 a Mr. Hodge taught in a log building which had formerly been used by D. S. Henry as a combined hotel and dwelling. In 1865 C. L. Blakeslee taught a subscription school in a community built frame building. He again taught such a school in 1867-68. In 1866-67 Judge Luther B. Ison taught a subscription school in a log cabin one mile east of Union on the A. H. Busick farm. Public school was also taught in 1866. In 1869 Belle Mallory taught a subscription school following a term as assistant to Mr. Blakeslee in the public school. In 1869-70 Joe Misner taught in the public school house. In 1869-70 O. McLoughlin taught a subscription school on Little Creek in a small frame house one and one-half miles east of Union. The following year Jason Moxley taught there.

That subscription schools continued is evidenced by the following announcement in the "Mountain Sentinel" under date of March 25, 1882: "A private school will be taught this summer in the public school building. Enough teachers will be on hand to teach the common branches, also higher mathematics, commercial studies, Latin and Greek, and other studies of like grade." As late as 1896 Miss Cora Knapp had a private school of 34 pupils:

The following story reprinted from the "Weekly Eastern Oregon Republican", December 31, 1891, also sheds light on the early schools.

"The first school building ever erected in the Grande Ronde Valley was built in Union in 1862. It was made of cottonwood logs — its dimensions being but 14 x 16 feet. This building stood near where now stands Wright's Opera House. (School bus garage location). It was destroyed by the fire that consumed Mannah's hall in 1883. The next school house was a small one-room frame building 14 x 20 feet located on the northeast corner of "A" and West First Streets, where it stood until last year when it was removed. When this building became inadequate, a larger one was erected on the block west of the court house square. This building was about 22 x 40, one story high. This with a small addition answered the purpose until 1878 when our liberal minded citizens raised by subscription . . . an amount necessary to erect at that time the finest school house in eastern Oregon. This was a two-story brick building containing four rooms. Again in 1890 it was found necessary to provide more room, and the district authorized . . . an addition . . . and instructed the directors to bond the district . . . By means of this fund there was erected the magnificent three-story building which now ornaments the square two blocks from the court house. It is now completed with the exception of the upper story. When finished it will contain twelve rooms and accomodate 500 or 600 pupils. The building is by far the finest school house in eastern Oregon and costs about \$20,000."

Mr. and Mrs. Merton Davis recall that the third floor of this building was in time well fitted as a gymnasium with tumbling mats, Indian clubs, trapeze, etc.

In 1892, the northeast room on the ground floor

was fitted up with furniture, a new teacher hired, and the tenth grade added. The curriculum was enriched by geometry, both plane and spherical, double-entry bookkeeping, business forms, Clark's grammar, geology, botany and astronomy, making a "very complete high school course." Tuition rates for outside pupils were set at \$3, \$4, and \$5 per term. There was an eight-months school.

Population increased and spread northward until in or about 1903 another building was erected on the block where the E. Reynolds Baxter home now stands. It became known as the North Building.

By 1910 the need for extended educational advantages was felt. Rowena Wilson Davis recalls parading her children from the North building up through Main Street to arouse interest and gain votes for bonds for a new high school building.

At a spirited May election "Automobiles flittered hither and yon," according to the report, bringing in the voters, who continued to come until time for closing the polls." The result was 156 for the bonds with 118 against. Due to legal difficulties this was declared "no election" and a second was held on June 2, with 153 for and 111 against.

Next followed a series of legal battles over the school board's choice of site, but after a final ruling by the Supreme Court in March of 1911, the tax payers upheld the board in the previous plan to secure the old court house site.

The classic style building was open for inspection in September. Second hand seats and "paraphernalia" were installed and other temporary arrangements made for holding school. Up-to-date equipment was soon provided.

In 1922, cooperative plans by the school district, the city of Union, and citizens of the town were ac-

tivated when ground was broken on November 3 for the HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM AND CIVIC AUDITORIUM. Mr. Baxter, manual training instructor, and his boys began work immediately. In three days a concrete foundation was poured for this 60 x 110 foot building, the boys working in relays when free from classes. Several teams had been donated, and men hauled the gravel. In February of 1933 the floor was initiated though the building was not yet completed.

In 1947 an enlarged and improved gymnasium was authorized. After short usage this building burned and the present one was erected.

In September of 1935 bonds were voted for the purpose of a new grade school. Money thus provided made possible a grant under the Federal Public Works Administration. The combined funds financed the J. F. Hutchinson School which was dedicated in October of 1936.

As a result of consolidation and population changes, the need for the most recent addition, the S. E. Miller School, was seen and authorized. Open house for this primary unit, kitchen, and multi-purpose facilities was held in March, 1958.

Echoing Mr. Busick, mentioned earlier, "The people of the district are always working for the advancement of their schools and the promotion of education in its highest standards."

## Chapter XV

# *Communities*

### **ALICEL:**

The little town of Alicel is situated in the heart of the Grande Ronde Valey about midway between majestic Mt. Emily on the West and rugged Mt. Harris on the East. The surrounding community is a rich agriculture area, commonly known as the Sand Ridge.

Along in the early 1890's a need of a shipping center was keenly felt. Produce must of necessity be hauled to Union Junction or La Grande by wagon road with horse drawn rigs. The distance was great and many a farmer hauled his entire crop to these junctions. As the building of a railroad as far as Elgin was rumored, plans were made for a community town as near the center as possible. The Ladd family owned the land and donated a sizeable piece as the town site. Alice Ladd was a niece, so the town was named in her honor, Alicel, in former years spelled with a capital "L".

The Post Office was founded on July 10, 1890 and was operated in conjunction with a small store by Dr. Cobb, a retired army doctor and his good wife. After a short time the store was sold to a man by the name of McCart. Several others followed, including R. L. Reasoner, Mr. and Mrs. B. F. Webb, R. O. Watkins and Ina McKennon.

The railroad was built in the same year, 1890, as far as Elgin. Three warehouses were erected by the Pacific Coast Warehouse Co., Kerr Gifford and Gutherie. These were operated by Chas. Playle, B. F. Webb and Frank Thorpe. Sacked grain was stored in the warehouses and piled with the aid of horses.

The warehouses were completed about the year 1896.

The only school in the community was about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of the present site, called Fairview. Later this was moved on farther east toward Mt. Harris and called Windy Point. A school house was built in Alicel proper in the year 1894, the present building being a part of the old one room school. About the year 1906 three rooms were in operation with two years of High School being taught. At present the first six grades are taught, with 17 students attending. Carl Roe was the first teacher in the Alicel school.



#### THE COMMUNITY CHURCH — ALICEL

Other buildings followed, with the building of two stores, a community church, a blacksmith shop, Farmers Union Hall and a Dance Hall.

The community has followed the agriculture economy. Through the years, wheat has continued an important crop and the little town has a large concrete elevator and several wheat warehouses. The community grew many sugar beets for the sugar fac-

tory in La Grande while it operated. Much grass seed is now produced. Business and community activities have gradually shifted to neighboring larger towns.

### **BACON:**

Bacon was so near like Baker that it was changed to Pyle later. It was a passing track at the mouth of Pyle Canyon named for an old railroad doctor. It has been abandoned.

### **BODY:**

Passing track two miles east of Kamela, named for Indian.

### **CAMP CARSON:**

Early day mining camp on the upper Grande Ronde.

### **CONLEY:**

Conley is a railroad station between Island City and Alicel, where Frank Conley loaded the wheat from his large farm when the railroad was built. The warehouse still stands and is used.

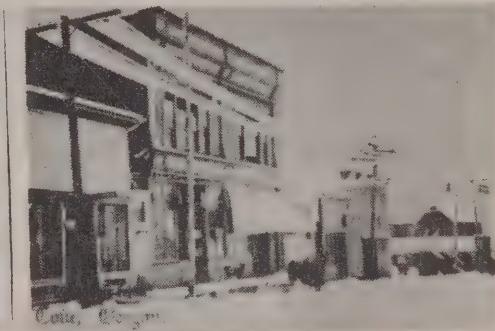
### **COVE:**

Cove, first named "Forest Cove", a name that so aptly applied to the beautiful spot on the eastern slope of Grande Ronde Valley, was settled, probably a few years earlier than is commonly recorded. The earliest date that comes to our attention is in 1858, when two young men each twenty-one years of age explored the valley and found traces of the white man's having been here. These two men, Randall Robinson and Edward Payne built a cabin near what is now known as "Hendershott Point", or "Phy's

Point"; the point west of Cove and toward Union. These men later took up homesteads in the vicinity of the present Mt. Fanny Grange Hall.



Very Early Cove



Cove, Oregon

In 1862 a number of settlers came into the Cove to make their homes. The first of these were Samuel Cowles and his daughter, Fannie Pauline, and a friend E. F. Daniels. The following spring Miss Fanny and Mr. Daniels were married. Dunham Wright and Benjamin Boswell came in at this time, leaving their train in Idaho. Others came as the year passed, among these, Samuel Gauthier French, who also had much to do with the growth of the section.

In 1863, Mrs. Daniels with others climbed the mountain back of Cove, and as she was the first to reach the top they named it Mt. Fanny, the name it still carries. The mines in Auburn and further east into Idaho were needing supplies, so Cove, as did other settlements in the valley, soon produced and freighted much of the necessary foods.

The original townsite of Cove is the land taken up as a homestead by Samuel Hayden in 1868 or '69, the patent having been issued March 19, 1874 and recorded in 1877. He platted his land in 1874, selling lots and small acreages, as late as 1884. Due to the fact that the plats and descriptions in the deeds did not conform, the courts were called upon to settle

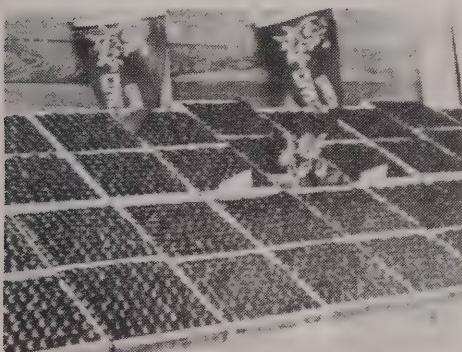
disputes to the lands in the original townsite, which were then cleared.

Cove became a thriving community in the 80's, through the 90's. Orchards were bearing their fruit. Mt. Fanny flour mill, a full roller-process mill was in operation. A sawmill and planer, east of town, steam operated, furnished lumber for general building, and for the many sizes of boxes for the packers and shippers of fruit and vegetables. A steam powered creamery was in operation, handling milk, and shipping cheese and butter. Other business enterprises were a bank, two general stores, two blacksmith shops, a drug store, a saloon, and the Cove Hotel, a very satisfying place to stay. The mail was daily and the Inland Telephone and Telegraph Company had built a telephone line.

As for news locally, a weekly paper first known as the "Ledger", was published by J. Nat Hayden, and later the name was changed to "The Courier", and edited by Willard N. Nelson. Later discontinued, and moved to Haines.

The first Church, "Unitarian", was organized under the leadership of a Mr. Morrison. The Episcopal Church dedicated in 1876 was built on land given by Samuel G. French, who also furnished most of the funds for its building. Again by his will in 1882 he gave funds and land, that Cove might have a girls boarding school, also a school for boys. The Ascension school for Girls opened in 1884, was accredited and well received by church school standards of that day. The Leighton Academy for boys was built a little later. In 1893 the Girls School was completely destroyed by fire and was never again used as a boarding school. The Church was opened, and the grounds activated in 1924 as a summer school and camp. Tents and the Old Morris Hall were used. Later buildings have been built, and more comforts installed. Today,

in 1961 the grounds and equipment are used as a recreational and educational center for the Missionary District of Eastern Oregon, of the Episcopal Church. Other churches established later, and leading in the Church life of the community are: Methodist, Baptist and Adventist. These have year round programs and all activities of a good Christian way of living. The Christian churches of Eastern Oregon have a summer camp site up Mill Creek to the east of Cove.



Upper left — Cove Cherry Fair; Upper right — Crowning of King and Queen at Cherry Fair; Lower center — Orchard cultivation in Cove when orchard was young.

It is interesting to look at Cove at its highest point in the '90's, through to its decline. There was a three acre hop yard yielding abundantly — a two furnace fruit dryer in operation for two or more months of the year — a steam dairy capable of 600 pounds of butter a day and pounds and pounds of cheese.

In 1900 were harvested an estimated 36 tons of

cherries, 175 tons of plums, 175 tons of Italian prunes, 33 tons of pears, and 750 tons of apples. The count of the fruit trees in bearing, and young trees to come into bearing in all kinds of fruit reads like a fairy tale. One man had 6000 prune trees.

The cherry orchards increased until in 1912 the orchardists organized the Annual Cherry Fair. This first Fair drew a mammoth crowd of 3000. It was a gala day, with a parade, a wonderful display of cherries, and a program in a pavilion on the Ascension School grounds. Here the King and Queen were crowned. Organizations served food from stands near by. These successful Fairs were held through 1917, but in 1918, due to war conditions, and freezing of the fruit, the project was canceled, never to function again.

This little town has been plagued by three destructive fires. In 1900 the greater part of the Main Street business houses were destroyed, but were soon rebuilt. Then again in 1919 and 1921 they were razed not to be rebuilt. This was partially due to declining business caused by the nearness to larger towns, the coming of motor transportation and weather conditions affecting the fruit industry.

Cove today is a beautiful place in which to have a home and to retire. It has good schools, adequately staffed, good building accommodation, and equipment. The High School maintains all departments, including sports and can take its place beside any school of its size. There are several churches. A library of well chosen books has had its ups and downs, after being twice damaged by fire. Now it is in its own stone building, small but sufficient. The hot spring in use since the earliest settlers came, now has a beautiful swimming pool and ample picnic grounds, and is the favorite spot in the county for swimming. Truly Cove is a most interesting spot in our Union County.

**CROMWELL:**

During the construction of the railroad a post office was established about three miles west of Telocaset near the point on the main line now called Sago. The office opened July 24, 1882 with Julius T. Cromwell as postmaster who continued until the office was closed December 2, 1884. The office was close to the wagon bridge on Antelope Creek and on the homestead of Robert Brannan. The office of Cromwell was sometimes referred to as Antelope Valley.

**CROOKS:**

A passing track at the Huffman Meadows in Pyle's Canyon.

**EAMS:**

See Sego.

**ELGIN:**

Four years after a permanent settlement was established in the Grande Ronde Valley, homesteaders moved from the lower end of the valley north and east across the river to that part of Indian Valley along Indian Creek and built a community. This was during the summer of 1865.

A man by the name of Gordon came over the Walla Walla trail with his horses. He built a cabin on the creek near, or a little below, the present location of Rock Wall Grange Hall and pastured his horses in the meadows along the creek and then drove them back across the mountains in the fall. In the spring he returned with his horses. The creek became known as Gordon Creek. A homesteader located on the creek that runs through the old Indian camp ground where Elgin now stands. His name was

Phillips; the name the creek still bears. Other settlers came from Grande Ronde and from Walla Walla and scattered about over Indian Valley. In 1872, Billy Hindman went way out east in the Cricket Flat Country and built his permanent cabin on Clarks Creek. The road and mail route to Wallowa left



#### ELGIN IN 1890

Grande Ronde Valley and cut northeast past Indian Valley post office in the old Indian Valley settlement and directly on to Elk Flat post office where settlers locating in the Cricket Flat country got their mail, and on to the Nez Perce trail to Wallowa.

All trails converged at Lochow Lochow, the Indian camp where Elgin now stands. People prophesied that a town would be there at what they called Fish Trap Ford, the place at which Indians built fish traps where the Nez Perce Trail forded the river. Bob Stevens had a farm just west of these traps.

There were rumors that a railroad might be built from La Grande north down the river. In the summer of 1885, he plotted three city blocks on the south side of the road that ran east and west through the south side of his property. He proceeded to sell lots in these blocks and also along the entire north side of the road. That fall S. B. Hamilton built the first dwelling and first store building. Dr. McNaughton came over from Summerville and also built a house to move into.



**Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Ezell in buggy on old Main St. before first fire of 1893.**

Hamilton applied for a post office for his store. Fish Trap Ford was too long or did not interest these settlers as a name. Because of recent Indian trouble Lochow Lochow did not appeal. The school district was called the Baker district, but there was already a <sup>B</sup> [unclear] Because of the many springs in the townsite they applied for the name of Springfield. A town in Lane County had been given that name, so it was denied. Young folks were singing a popular song with a catchy tune, "Lost on the Lady Elgin". McNaughton, a musician, liked it. They all liked it, and applied for the name Elgin. It was granted and

on September 28, 1885, the office at Elgin was officially established.

The town boomed. A continuous row of wooden buildings sprang up on the north side of main street and three blocks of buildings on the south side. The railroad was coming. Jesse Hindman bought the old Stevenson farm and offered the railroad company ample room for a terminal. This was accepted and Hindman laid the rest of the farm off in lots and sold it.

On October 25, 1890, the first train came to Elgin. On January 5, 1891, the first passenger train came and on that date the new town put on a big banquet and program. Elgin was now the shipping point for the north end of the county and all of Wallowa County. Freight and stage service to Wallowa was heavy.



**WALLOWA STAGE LEAVING ELGIN**

On a hot dry summer day, August 29, 1893, a fire started on main street and burned down both sides, 23 buildings. Buildings were replaced but many were located in other parts of the town. In 1896, Main Street again burned, but there were fewer buildings to burn. These fires and an epidemic of typhoid sparked the building of a water system by piping Indian Creek water into town.

In 1901, the sixteen year old city had a pressure water system, electricity and 56 business establishments; 18 sawmills hauled lumber to Elgin where two planing mills were located. The Wallowa trade continued to flourish.

Extension of train service to Wallowa County, in 1908, stopped the freight and stage traffic. Elgin suffered and slumped in spite of a growing agriculture. In 1924, Bill Moore started building the Ponderosa Pine Lumber Co. to manufacture wood specialty products. His unusual business ability caused him and Elgin to prosper until his death in 1944.

Upon his death the big plant changed hands. Large lumber companies bought it to get the timber land that went with it, and closed the mill down.

Today the Western Stud Mill is the largest industry in Elgin. The town with about 1400 people is well built, but at an equilibrium of economy with its agriculture and lumber industry, looking for something to appear.

## ELK FLAT:

The Elk Flat Post Office was established April 17, 1878, with Joseph M. Tucker as postmaster, to serve the country east of the present town of Elgin, now called Cricket Flat. It was on the Old Wallowa Road and at the northeast edge of a flat valley. Close

to where the office was located elk had developed a lick in the volcanic tuft of a hillside. Many elk grazed in this valley and came to this lick during early days. The valley was called Elk Flat and office named for the valley by its side.

About a year before the office was discontinued to Elgin on November 11, 1886, it was moved some two miles farther along the road toward Wallowa, to the Braden place on the hill at a point very near where Highway 82 now cuts through the top of the Owenby Hill, some 6 miles east of Elgin.

### **FISH TRAP FORD:**

Early name for location of Elgin.

### **FOREST COVE:**

Early name for Cove.

### **GLOVER:**

Passing track between Hilgard and Kamela.

### **HILGARD:**

This little town of Hilgard came into being when the Oregon Railway and Navigation (O.R. & N.) railroad built through the narrow canyon. A large part of the payroll during the years of railway construction found its way into the tills of the merchants, hotel keepers and saloons along its main street.

It is hard to visualize that this was a thriving pioneer community for the thirty years from 1880 to 1910, the hub of activity for the construction workers, cattle and sheep men, loggers, miners, lumbermen and homesteaders.

The name Hilgard which was given to the post

office, is believed to come from Henry Villard. Villard was responsible for the building of the railroad over the Blue Mountains and it is safe to assume that the town should bear his name which originally was Villard not Hilgard.



#### HILGARDS MAIN BUSINESS STREET

Picture to yourself its main street with wooden business buildings with false fronts, well worn wooden sidewalks, hitching posts, the inevitable blacksmith shop and livery stable, the hotel, the little railroad station, the one room school house that doubled as a community center and church not forgetting the big yellow dance hall and lodge hall. We must mention the saloons for they were the men's domain exclusively where they gathered for drinking and cards.

There was never a time in Hilgard when there was not a community Sunday School. Visiting persons drew capacity crowds, for it was a decent community and its pioneer residents were there to find a better life for themselves and their families.

Formal education ended with eighth grade graduation ceremonies which were most elaborate. Some families, however, sent their children out to boarding schools. However, culture was not lacking for there were literary societies, debates, and music recitals. A very creditable orchestra under excellent direction, was open to all who wished to play an instrument.

In winter their recreation was skating and dancing with food afterward served by some family in their home. In spring time with its high water making log drives very hazardous and highly entertaining, they were of such importance that even school children were dismissed to join the spectators on the banks of the Grande Ronde River.



Hilgard #22 School House

In later years before 1910, the timber was beginning to thin, less lumber was produced. The mill, planer and timber were sold and the population drifted to more populated areas or to new frontiers. Many of the old buildings were destroyed by fire or were demolished. Fences fell to ruin and the thriving, neat picturesque mountain town is fading into obscurity.

One family that should be mentioned in connection with the hotel and other holdings and the development of Hilgard is John Casey and family. It seems that at one time he owned most of the business in the town.

## HOT LAKE:

The Price Hunt party came over the hill into the valley in 1812 and one of their party, Robert Stewart, seeing steam in the distance, through curiosity, went to see what was happening. He found this large boiling spring and hot lake surrounded by marshes and tules. This hot lake, Indian legend tells us, was set aside as a peace ground by medicine men of the Indian tribes. They utilized the curative powers of the "youth waters". so the tribal leaders ruled that this and the valley that surrounded it belonged to all Indians as a place of peace, rest and cure for their sick. No Indian war was to take place here.

One of the world's hottest mineral flows is a feature of this hot spring: A twenty-four hour output of 2,500,000 gallons of boiling mineral water of high therapeutic value has been constant since before the white man entered the picture.



Hot Lake facing the valley



Hot Lake facing the mountain

In 1864 Samuel F. Newhart came into the valley from California, soon learned the healing qualities of the water and built a hotel in cooperation with a Mr. Clark as partner. The building included a dance hall which was a great help in bringing guests to their hotel. After Mr. Clark's death, Mr. Newhart married and together they ran the hotel and bath-houses, enlarging and making the place more attrac-

tive. All buildings were whitewashed. The bath-houses were in a row between the hotel and lake, and were equipped with wooden bath tubs used for hot mineral baths or mud baths. The hotel faced the hill and county road which ran along the foot of the hill. The beautiful flowers and growing poplar trees made an attractive setting for the white buildings.

At the coming of the railroad the post office, Hot Lake, was put on the map. The little house on the far side of the lake was a resting place and shelter and dressing room. Mr. Newhart was postmaster for fifteen years. In 1900 he disposed of their interests to Dr. Minthorn and Bear Cook who tore down existing buildings. A modern hotel was built including a large fireplace, up to date bath house, and a housing over the boiling spring. Boating on the lake and hunting in season were the chief recreations.

Almost as soon as this construction was completed, Dr. Tape and his wife were the next owners. Both were good musicians and charmingly entertained their guests. All the while Hot Lake was becoming better known throughout the west as a health resort. Dr. W. T. Phy joined the staff at this time.

In a short time the Hon. Walter M. Pierce and the O.W.R.N. railroad became interested in the resort with Dr. Phy as manager. A large brick addition was constructed joining the Minthorn-Cook lobby by making a very large building. The third floor, with its very modern surgery, was the hospital. The second floor was guests' rooms, the first floor offices, lobby, parlor, dining and kitchen facilities. The old lobby became a dance and recreation hall. This resort was now named Hot Lake Sanatorium which became one of the most outstanding hospitals in the northwest. At the peak of its popularity it "was referred to as a "town under one roof". At this time

there were as many as 300 people under the one roof. Nearly one hundred of these were employees. Dr. Phy was joined by his son, Mark T. Phy, who carried on for a few years after his father's death. Dr. W. T. Phy was considered one of the best surgeons of his time.



**Hot Lake Sanatorium before the fire on May 7, 1934**

Doctors Gregory and Haun, now in La Grande, took over the Sanatorium for some time. Others have managed it. The big fire of May 7, 1934, destroyed all but the brick building. This was indeed a misfortune for the frame part was never rebuilt.

At the present and since 1942, Dr. and Mrs. A. J. Roth have been owners and managers.

The third floors is a well regulated and adequately staffed home for "Golden Agers" and those who need some hospital care or are without home care. The second floor is for guests and the first floor, as always, has the offices, lobby, recreation room, dining and kitchen facilities. In recent years Hot Lake has been emphasizing its resort facilities. Many

guests make it headquarters for trips into the mountains and hunting small game as well as large. Also streams in the area are stocked with rainbow trout and no license is required for fishing here. A semi-private swimming pool is under construction and more landscaping will be finished this year 1961.

### IMBLER:

In 1890 when the O.R. & N. (Oregon Railroad and Navigation Co.) completed their branch line from La Grande to Indian Valley at Elgin, they built a station about three miles from the north side of Grande Ronde Valley on the Jesse Imbler farm. This is in some of the most fertile farm land of the county, and residents were elated to have a station. They made contributions to build a depot and plotted off a town-site in 1891.



Upper left — Main Street in Imbler in 1920's. Upper right—McKinnis Flour Mill at Imbler 1904. Lower center — Lumber yard in Imbler when the lumber industry boomed.

Very soon business houses were built, and it became the shipping point of the then important town of Summerville, a few miles to the west. On April 27, 1891 a post office was established. Mrs. Conklin, Mrs. Nellie Kemp and Mrs. William Rollins were all postmistresses before the job passed to Walter Stringham, who had the first general store. Isaac Skillings built a blacksmith shop; A. T. Hill, a drug store; William Hull, a meat market; Mr. and Mrs. Coble had a hotel and a livery stable. Dr. Fisher came to Imbler to practice; Mr. Anderson had a hardware store and Mr. Dennison a barber shop.



**VIEW OF IMBLER — 1909**

In 1903, John McKinnis and Jesse Hindman built a modern flour mill. Imbler had a bank and a moving picture theater, as well as warehouses on the track. The first church was erected in 1900 and the town incorporated in 1912, and a modern high school erected in 1913.

Through the years, Imbler has been a shipping point for grain and livestock from the rich surrounding farm district. However, as soon as the station was established, lumber from the hills to both east and west came here for processing and shipping. The

early 1900's saw it a lumber shipping point. For the past 40 years lumber has ceased to be an important industry.



**Imbler amid its Apple Orchards in 1920's.**

As lumber declined, apples increased. The 1910's and 1920's saw Imbler become an apple shipping center, with hundreds of acres of well-cared-for orchards and an annual carload shipment tallied in three figures. A change in oversea shipment to refrigeration permitted the larger irrigated apples, which did not have the keeping qualities to reach Europe without refrigeration, to take the market.

However, two other crops were coming into prominence. Sweet cherries had been grown commercially in the county for many years. Acreage was increasing in the north end of the county, and the growers organized the Pumpkin Ridge Cherry Growers to market their crop. Their warehouse was located at Imbler. This has become a stable industry with a steady market. The normal shipment from Imbler runs around 400 tons of fresh fruit.

About the same time that cherries were becoming important, the Blue Mountain Seed Growers organized to market grass and legume seed. They established headquarters at Imbler and handled seed from quite a wide area of eastern Oregon. This business was sold to the Pacific Supply, but seed warehouses and cleaning plants were increasing in numbers and the seed industry became more specialized to grass seeds. Today Imbler has many warehouses and cleaning plants, is the home of three grass seed companies, and quite justly claims to be the grass seed center of the United States.

### **INDIAN VALLEY:**

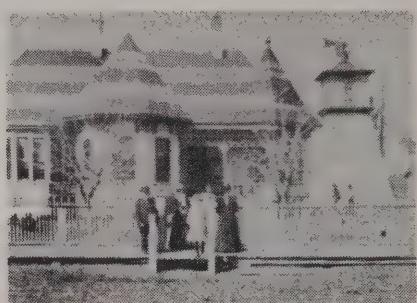
This post office on the Old Wallowa Road was opened to serve settlers who moved onto Indian Creek in 1865 and continued to make their homes there and develop a community. It was located where the Wallowa Road crossed the creek, on the east side of the creek and the north side of the road. Later the school was moved to the south side of the road, across from the post office. The Indian Creek Market Road still crosses the creek at this point.

The office was established April 10, 1873, with John W. White as postmaster. It was discontinued January 13, 1874, and then reopened June 11, 1874 with Joel Weaver as postmaster. Three other people served as postmaster before the office was closed on October 26, 1881.

### **ISLAND CITY:**

Island City in days gone by was a rival with La Grande for the business of the valley, and today is again the home of several firms. It was named for its location on what was once an island in the Grande Ronde River. The river, which in low water ran south

of the town, divided about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles above Island City and part of went north of where the town now stands. This formed a low brushy island about seven miles long and not much over a mile wide at the widest part. Much of it was subject to overflow in high water.



Upper left -- First Steel Bridge in Union County at Island City;  
Upper right -- Island City Residence of Years Ago  
Lower center -- M. L. Carter's Drug Store, Island City about 1900

The old Indian trail, now known as the Black Hawk Trail, went east from the mouth of the canyon along the north side of the south, or main branch, of the Grande Ronde River. A branch road turned north from where Island City was built, to go to Summerville and over the mountain by way of Ruckle. Joe Anson (Orlin Joseph Anson), who lives  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles southeast of Island City on the farm where he was born and which his folks took up in 1863, says:

"When the railroad was built to La Grande the company straightened the river from the canyon east to keep water off of their yards and away from the depot. When they built to Island City they dug a drain ditch on by and east of town to take surplus water away. These drains have washed out to become the present river channel. The old Indian Trail went right by our house and I well remember it as a boy. Three miles east a branch went north down the Sand Ridge to the Walla Walla Trail and Wallowa."

Joseph Magrue first settled at Island City and traded his claim to Caviness for a pack horse. In 1872 John Caviness and a Mr. Sterling erected a grist mill at the place where the Summerville Road turned north from the Indian Trail. Chas. Goodnough set up a store and in 1884 organized the Island City Mercantile & Milling Company which became one of the largest business enterprises in the county in the 19th century. In 1896 the milling interests were sold to the Pioneer Flour and Milling Company which still operates over the county from the Island City headquarters. Tap Thomas had the first blacksmith shop. A Mr. Bear had a two-story hotel of about 25 rooms. A Mr. Linzey had a dance hall. After about ten years fire burned the hotel and dance hall. The post office was established April 10, 1872 with Mr. Sterling as postmaster.

Today highways converge from all parts of the county to Island City. It is connected to La Grande, some two miles away, with a pavement that is almost a continuous business street. Both the grain and elevator companies that operate in the county have their headquarters at Island City. It is the home of two of the four major farm machinery companies. For years it has had the only cement culvert and tile

factory in the county. Several oil companies distribute petroleum products from Island City. It also has one of three really large supermarkets in the county.

### KAMELA:

There are two stories as to the origin of this name, both quite interesting and logical. Gilbert Conner of Pendleton, a Nez Perce who is recognized as an authority on Indian lore, states that it is a slight corruption of the Indian word for larch (tamarack) trees, "ke-mel'-a". Larch trees predominate at Kamela. Seventy-eight year old Mr. J. K. Charlton, who has been associated with this area since boyhood, states that the place was named for an Oregon Trail emigrant girl by the name of Kamela who was buried there.



**Kamela Store — Cord Wood  
Rick at left.**



**Kamela Store during  
Short Summer Time**

When the railroad was built over the Blue Mountains west of La Grande it was necessary to construct a station at the 4200 ft. summit of the mountains. This would be a point where extra engines would be stationed to help the heavy trains up the hills from both sides. A "Y" was built in the tracks to permit turning engines around. Water tanks and coal bunkers were installed to service the big steam engines used as helpers.

On July 20, 1887 the post office of Kamela was established. On this mountain summit winters were long and snows were deep. Mr. Charlton, who was a lifelong railroader, states that he has seen eight feet of snow at Kamela. Tracks had to be kept open and some half a dozen big engines kept in readiness to go to the foot of the mountain on either side to help trains up the hill.



#### KAMELA, OREGON

About two miles east on Strickland Flats, just over the Umatilla county line, a little sawmill operated for a time, but Kamela with its big forests could never have been a sawmill town. Instead, its thick groves of tamarack trees were ideal for tie cutting. In the surrounding hills railroad ties were hewed with broad-axes and hauled to the station by the hundreds of car loads.

Almost equal to the shipment of railroad ties was the making of cordwood. Thousands and thousands of cords of wood were shipped from the little station.

In Kamela's most active days it had two stores, two boarding houses and one saloon along with the school house and residences. The Oregon Trail passed through it.



8 ft. of snow at Kamela



Kamela, Oregon

Today activities of man have shifted. The new Oregon Trail Freeway cuts through east near Strickland Flats and the paved road through Kamela no longer carries a line of heavy traffic. Powerful diesel engines pull freight trains over the mountains and the steam helpers no longer needed to be maintained and serviced at Kamela.

Peaceful little Kamela rests on the mountain pass beside its highway and helps keep trains moving over the transcontinental railroad, but the task is no longer so strenuous. In its leisure there are the memories when sounds of crosscut saws and broad axes rang through its forests, and the odor of coal smoke drifted across the country as big steam locomotives puffed away bringing trains over the mountain.

### LA GRANDE:

With the nucleus of a permanent community established in the southwest corner of the valley in 1861 and '62, the history of La Grande begins. The Ben Brown family moved into their sturdy log house in May 1862, this, the first home in La Grande. The

influx of settlers was great until around 1870. Many who had passed through before blazing the Oregon Trail, returned and other wagon trains came from the middle west. Many hearing of the discoveries of the rich placer mines in eastern Oregon and Idaho, remained here as this was a central place for families of miners to live.



**La Grande's First Band at  
O'Brian Hotel - B St.**

**First Flour Mill  
Mill Canyon 1865**

The little village submitted the name Brownsville or Brownstown, however, there was a Brownsville in Linn County and the Post Office Department decreed that some more distinctive name be selected. A young Frenchman in the community who often referred to the beauty of the valley often used the French phrase "La Grande" in this connection. Little is known of this individual other than his name Henry Dause. This name was accepted and in 1865, the post office opened with Edward Patterson as Post Master.

The growth was miraculous, almost the proportion of a boom. There were the usual blacksmith shops, wagon and plow shops, general stores, furniture shops, every shop that was needed to aid in the building of a new home in the west. The hotels and livery stables, stage stations and freight stops.

The first industry in La Grande was a grist mill built at the mouth of Mill Canyon in south La Grande, the canyon and creek taking the name from this early structure. It was a stone burr type mill powered by steam and capable of milling twenty-five barrels a day. This was built by a Mr. Wood in 1865, sold in 1866 to John R. Wilkinson and disposed of in 1874 to Augustine T. Gangloff who operated it for many years. He had taken up land to the north and was interested in nursery stock.



**Wilkinson Store -later  
"Opera House" and Com-  
munity center about 1867**



**La Grande Hotel  
location of present  
Safeway Store**

The town was plotted with streets A, B, C, and D etc., running east and west and streets north and south were numbered. Dan Chaplin, one of the most prominent citizens, built his home on the hill behind the town on B Street. The first crude homes and business houses were rebuilt and re-sided, and either painted or whitewashed. The postmaster had a general store on C Street and brought in a large shipment of paints, oils and kerosene. His storage was a cave or dugout in the hill to the south.

Mr. Wilkinson, who owned the mill, opened a grocery store on C Street and in time it was purchased by a Mr. Mahaffey who rebuilt it into a community center, calling it the "Opera House", a hall used for all gatherings and dance parties.

The first teacher was Providence Currey, teaching in a small building with benches cut from logs, with only five or six pupils attending. Schools were subscription schools financed by a rate system, until 1868 when school district No. 1 was organized, that the school funds might be increased by taxation and a better system planned and carried out.



**"Little White School" - B St.  
First School in La Grande**



**Blue Mt. University  
1875**

A two-story school building, costing \$3,000, painted white, was built on the west hillside a little southwest of B street. The need for more class room was ever present. The "White School" was built in 1886 where the present High School stands. From there until 1900 when class rooms overflowed, various buildings were rented. Foreseeing a need for room in the future, the district bought the 2 blocks of land and the then closed Blue Mt. University. The building was razed and a large brick building containing 12 class and office rooms was built and ready for use in 1900 as both the grade school and the high school. The high school in the same block was built in 1908, a three-story building. This has been badly damaged by fire twice. At present only two stories remain. During the years since, other buildings, the gymnasium and domestic science and other rooms have been added.

The first school built on the north side of town was called "The Little Brick", a small building that stood on Fir Street, where the Hendrix Methodist Church now stands. In 1906 the Greenwood school was built and the little "Brick School" sold. Also on the north side, another building was badly needed so in 1915 the Riveria School was completed. Later the Willow School was erected to take care of pupils in the northeastern part of town. To date La Grande has with its new high school and grade schools, auditorium and gymnasium, a school system of which the city should be overly proud, since the older buildings have been added to and equipped for the present day curricular advantages.



**Little Brick School - Fir St.  
Present location of Hendrix  
Methodist Church**

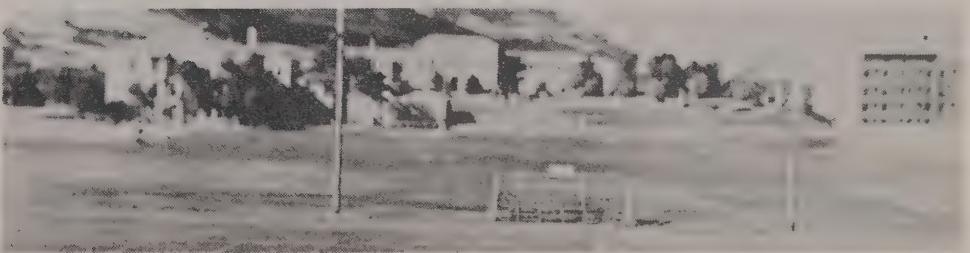
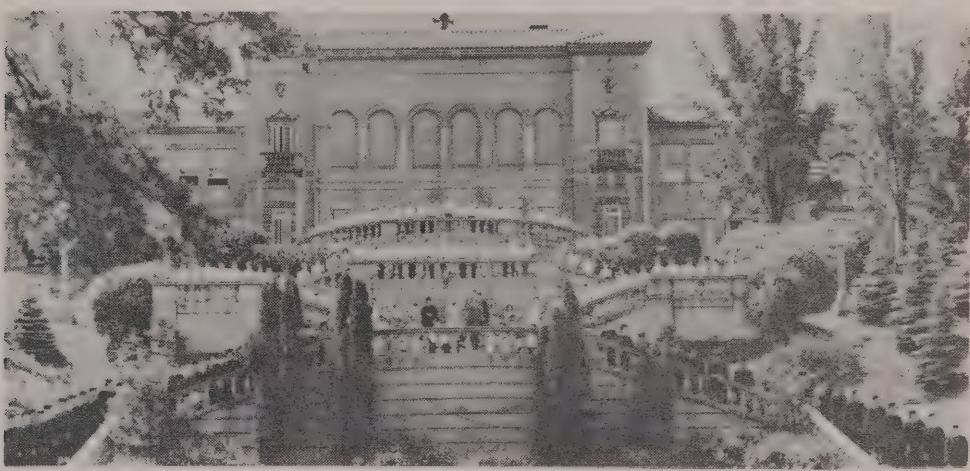


**First Church built in new town  
Presbyterian - 1886**

As to other advantages in education, the Blue Mountain University under the jurisdiction of the Methodists of the Columbia opened for school in 1875. with college courses and preparatory courses. The first graduating class was in 1880, the last in 1884. The doors were closed in 1886 due to inadequate financing.

Now, the Eastern Oregon College overlooks the city where once was a pioneer cemetery. It was opened in June of 1929 with a summer school for teacher's education thus beginning as a normal school. Today

it has a four year program in all departments and each year is enlarging its educational scope, including graduate school. The campus has grown in these few years from just the Administration building to a large campus with dormitories, teachers' training department, coliseum, student center and library. The



**EASTERN OREGON COLLEGE**

Walter M. Pierce Library houses the library and faculty lounge. On the lower floor is the museum, both for history and natural science, and an art display room. New construction is being planned for the immediate future. The activities of the college being to La Grande a chance for an aesthetic appreciation above and beyond communities less favored.

In past years La Grande has had several schools of business. Among them were Harper's, also Draper's, but today such courses are covered in the curriculum of the Eastern Oregon College.

As to music and art appreciation, these have been developed since the beginning of La Grande. Our schools have always prided themselves on their music and art departments. Since in early days the subjects have been taught by specialists in their work. "Sing" schools and choral groups have always had



**Episcopal Church just moved from "Old Town", looking north on 4th St. — 1887. Flag pole back of Episcopal Church is on City Hall where library now stands.**

their place in the community. In the '90's the "Ladies Tuesday Musical", later combined with the Neighborhood Club did much to keep alive the appreciation of good entertainment. The "Chautaugua" held in Riverside Park did much to keep this spirit. Our once so important municipal band was second to none. It derived its support from the City of La Grande. Today the Grande Ronde Symphony Orchestra and Association composed of talent at home and vicinity has developed into one of the strongest such groups in the northwest. Its leader is from the Eastern Oregon College Music Department and many players are from the student body. The funds remaining in the treasury of the Municipal Band were turned over to the Symphony as a starter for their financing.



**La Grande Looking West — 1888**

The churches had their beginning by inspiration of missionaries. The Methodists and Episcopalians worked side by side using the same building for serv-

ices. The Episcopalians built St. Peter's Church, the first church building dedicated, in 1875, located at



**Interior of La Grande National Bank before 1900**



**Murphy Hardware — Adams and Depot**

4th and D Streets. The Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Adventist and Lutherans have built on the hill. The Presbyterians built on the flat in 1886. St. Peter's Episcopal Church was moved to the present site of their stone church built in 1924. The Catholic Church built their new church on the hill not far from the old one. They also had a church school, St. Frances Academy, which served many years until it burned. La Grande is very church minded and since the new town came into existence many more denominations have their churches and annexes, a truly church minded community.



**Land Office when Ukiah was opened for homestead**

La Grande is fortunate in having two accredited hospitals, the first built in 1907 at the west end of Adams Avenue. Dr. N. Molitor, Dr. A. L. Richardson and other doctors erected across the street from a nursing home which was used prior to the hospital completion. The other, St. Joseph Hospital, was opened in 1938 under the Sisters of Saint Frances. The

new wing, almost doubling the capacity, was dedicated in 1956.



**GRANDE RONDE HOSPITAL**



**ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL**

The coming of the railroad in 1884 made a big change in the then city of La Grande for as soon as the survey was completed in 1882, the town began to move to the flat and people began to think in terms of "New Town" and "Old Town". The first business houses built were small frame buildings. To give an idea of the rapidity in which the move was made, thirty-five residences were built in 1889, one hundred fifty-two in 1890, and in 1891 one hundred eighty-three. In 1890 there were 10 brick houses and two

years later there were twenty-six. During a period of five months in 1892 there were 658 front feet of brick buildings. The first in the New Town was built by Williamson and Rogers, corner of Adams and Depot Street. The greater part of these buildings are still in use. Some now have a second story added, and others have new fronts and other modernizations.



Adams Avenue before pavement

La Grande in its early days experienced many destructive fires. The first in 1874 in Old Town was started in the La Grande Brewery which was located on C Street near the Mill Creek spreading to B Street. Dan Chaplin and Green Arnold had built a gravity water system bringing water from Mill Creek through wooden pipes, home manufactured. Then, La Grande could boast a water system. Twenty-one buildings were lost, seventeen of them business houses.

The second fire in 1886 started in J. Brook's general merchandise store, now Falk's I. D. Store or in

a Chinese restaurant nearby. The Sommer Hotel burned rapidly, then the fire crossed the street burning everything on both sides of the street, including the depot at the railroad yards. The loss totaled over \$100,000 with less than one-third insurance carried.

On July 4, 1891, a third fire became out of control in the kitchen of the Blue Mountain Hotel, located where the Elk's Temple now stands, the same hotel built by J W. Dickey after the fire in 1874 in the Old Town. This fire burned north taking four blocks of business houses to the ground in less than an hour. This loss was placed at about \$125,000 with about one-third coverage by insurance. Another devastating fire consumed six business houses on December of the



**First Fire Truck**



**Volunteer Hose Cart**

same year. This was on Adams Avenue to the east of the other fires, a loss of \$54,000. The city without adequate fire protection, the next year spent \$50,000 building a water supply system. A volunteer fire department was organized and fully equipped.

La Grande has always been from its beginning a very hospitable city with plenty of hotels to care for its guests and the transient. In new La Grande, hotels were moved from Old Town and new ones built. The Sommer Hotel, now a rooming house, was rebuilt after the fire of 1886. J. E. Foley built the Foley Hotel in about 1900 and a little later added quite an ad-

dition. While mentioning the Foley, it is interesting to note, the largest rush on the U. S. land office, which was in this building in 1905, was the day the office opened to accept claims in the Ukiah area. Citizens formed lines for six weeks before the deadline, holding them night and day on a relief basis. Another large hotel is the Sacajawea built by Julius Roesch after retiring from the brewery business. This is to-



SACAJAWEA HOTEL — LA GRANDE, ORE.

day the home of La Grande's Chamber of Commerce and meeting place of the civic organizations. Then too, the Sacajawea Annex to the south in the same block is office buildings on the first floor, second and third floors are a medical center, and the other four floors are apartments and sleeping rooms. A third hotel was built where the Safeway store now stands, the La Grande Hotel. It had many misfortunes and was finally closed during the depression.

In total, La Grande has had about 20 newspapers. The Grande Ronde Sentinel, a Democratic sheet and the Blue Mountain Times, Republican, began publication on the same date in April 1868. The present daily paper, La Grande Observer, had its beginning in the old Gazette and the Eastern Oregon Observer with its first publication in 1896. The last one to begin publication was the present Eastern Oregon Review founded in 1932.

In closing these glimpses into the history of La Grande, it is well to note a few facts about our early city officials and government. Records of the early officials seem to have been lost, but it is recorded in the acts of the state legislature that the incorporation of La Grande was approved on the 18th of December 1865. When the plat of the original town was filed in the office of the Commission of the Land Office in 1868, it shows E. P. Patterson the mayor, and R. H. Mallory president of the Commission. Under a new charter granted in 1885, a year after the railroad was built through the town, the first officers of the city of La Grande were: Mayor, C. H. Finn; Recorder, R. C. Warriner; Treasurer, A. T. Neill; Attorney, J. D. Slater; Marshal, J. W. McCoy; members of the Council, First Ward, Ben Brown, David Bay, W. J. Snodgrass, R. E. Bryan; Second Ward, C. Ralston, H. E. Wildey, E. L. Dean and G. M. Means. The city hall at this time was a frame building, painted white, located at 4th and Penn Ave., and was removed at the time the City Library was built. It was a long narrow building with a jail in the rear, and as it should be, the Stars and Stripes were flying from a tall white flag pole.

## LOCHOW LOCHOW :

(Lock-o Loch-o) Indian camp where Elgin stands.

**LOOKING GLASS:**

Railroad station once called Palmer Junction.

**LONE TREE:**

Lone Tree is a passing track on the railroad between La Grande and Hot Lake. It was named for a lone pine which was a land mark of pioneer days. The tree was destroyed by vandals in 1935.

**LUND:**

Passing track between Sego and North Powder.

**MEDICAL SPRINGS:**

The story of Medical Springs, a community on the upper Powder River drainage, and on the south edge of Union County, is so closely tied to the story of the man, Dunham Wright, who homesteaded the location, that we shall start by mentioning him. He was a rather close relative to Abraham Lincoln and, as a youth, followed the emigration west. In the fall of 1862, he arrived in Eastern Oregon to seek his fortune in the mines, as so many young men did.



**POOL AT MEDICAL SPRINGS**

In 1865, while running a pack train to Sanger, he stopped to water his horses at a small stream where several Indians were camped. When the thirsty ani-

mals would not drink, he was perplexed until an Indian motioned for him to put his hand in the water. He discovered that it was hot water.

Wright continued to remember the hot spring and the beautiful grass that grew around it. After his marriage, his bride asked him to take her to the hot spring that he had talked about and homestead it, even though it was far from any settlement. With his own hands he cleared a road to move their household belongings to the homestead by spring. They moved in 1868.



**DUNHAM WRIGHT — at his pioneer decorated front gate**

Their only neighbors were Indians who from time immemorial visited these healing waters as a shrine

of health. The Wrights were friendly people and they became friends of all the Indians. Red men brought venison to them and bought vegetables from the homesteader's garden. They became good neighbors; in fact, a young Indian brought Wright's mail bearing the news that he was elected to the State Legislature in 1872. That same Indian, as an old man, came in evening dress to Wright's 100th birthday party at the Sacajawea Hotel in La Grande, and went to much effort to come and stand with bowed head when Wright was buried on the hill near Medical Springs.



#### MEDICAL SPRINGS, OREGON

As other settlers moved closer, white people also came to bathe in the mineral waters. Accommodations were built for them. No one was ever turned away from Medical Springs for lack of money, but enough did pay to allow the gradual building of a resort.

The rolling hills and valleys around the springs supported comfortable farms. A little, long valley just north had several good farms. Because of its location between the hills it was, and still is, called "The Park". This was good livestock country and the Powder River mines made a good market for vegetables and dairy products. On August 9, 1887, a post office was established at Medical Springs, and since that day the Stars and Stripes have continued to fly over this office.

The water of the springs contains 12 different minerals that are beneficial to the human body. Hundreds of people came to Medical Springs to be relieved of rheumatism, skin diseases, stomach ailments, and other troubles. The resort grew to have a hotel with 40 rooms, ballroom, beautiful lobby, 50x150 ft., concrete bathing pool, and many other features.

In August, 1918, fire destroyed all of the buildings of the resort. Dunham Wright, now an old man, continued to operate as best he could until his death in 1942. Since then his daughter, Grace Powers, and his grandson, Ned Foye, have kept the store and post office and taken care of some guests who still come to the healing waters.

Medical Springs has the distinction of being the closest post office to the exact center of the 50 states of the Union. People like to know that the healing waters and the homestead of the friendly, benevolent centenarian, whom neighbors call the "Sage of Medical Springs", are at the heart of the United States.

### **MONTANIC:**

Passing track between Body and Glover, named for Indian.

### **MOUNT GLEN:**

Group of homes at foot of Mt. Emily. Location of first settlement in 1861.

## NORTH POWDER:

North Powder is in the extreme south part of Union County on the bank of the North Powder River, from which it gets its name. Lewis and Clark show the Powder River on their map under the Indian name "Port-pel-lah" meaning powdery soil. In 1811 the Astor party camped near North Powder and their man, Donald McKenzie, is supposed to have named the river according to the Indian names. Peter Skene Ogden used this name some years later.



**STREET SCENE AT NORTH POWDER**

It was near here that on December 30, 1811 the Indian wife, Madam Dorion, of the white guide of the Astor party, Pierre Dorion, gave birth to the first child with white blood born west of the Rockies. Never since that time has the voice of the white man been silent in the growth and development of the North Powder region.

Old records state in 1851 Ruben Riggs came to eastern Oregon and settled on North Powder River. It is thought that he had the first homesteader's cabin and the first sawmill in this area.

The town of North Powder had its beginning in the days of the great migration on the Oregon Trail as a camping place, then in the migration to the Powder River mines in 1862-63. In 1862 it was establish-

ed and run as a stage station by Professor James De-Moss, who helped establish the first post office on October 2, 1868 with Joseph Austin as first postmaster. The first stock ranches were taken up in 1863, and it has developed as a livestock community since that day.



#### NORTH POWDER, ORE.

In 1870 the foundation for a flour mill with 4 foot stone burrs and 30 barrel capacity in 24 hours was laid. In 1872 it was complete and operating from the power of a wooden turbine water wheel with iron buckets. This mill, built by Nicholas Tarter was the first industry of the town.

In 1878 the only buildings were the old mill, a house partly still standing on the Chris Johnson place, the post office, and a house where Hudelson's warehouse later stood. On February 26, 1881, the Bethel Baptist Church was organized with Rev. E. P. Waltz preaching the first sermon. In the spring of 1883 the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized by Rev. Shepard. The following year a building was

erected and for six years both congregations used it on alternate Sundays.

James Welch owned the location of North Powder and he had it surveyed in 1883 and laid out and dedicated in 1884.



**HOTEL — NORTH POWDER, OREGON**



**ICE STORAGE — NORTH POWDER**

In 1892 Andrew Lun who had been in the lumber business in North Powder for six years, purchased a nearby farm and built an artificial lake of some 20 acres. From this lake he annually harvested from 8,000 to 15,000 tons of ice which was loaded on railroad cars from an ice house on the railroad "Y". The ice house burned, but he built another along the main tracks. In 1911 he sold his ice plant to the Pacific Fruit and Express Co. who operated it until it burned to the ground from a lightning strike in 1937.

In 1902 the city of North Powder was incorporat-

ed. On August 5 of that year the following officers assumed duty:

Mayor, Herman Rothchild; Recorder, H. Polen; Treasurer, S. Vandecar; Aldermen, H. O. Gorham, G. A. Lee, Thomas Burnes, J. E. Carrell, William Shaw, Jr., J. R. McLaren; and Marshal, R. E. Haines.

At that time there were about twelve places of business in town, also three churches, newspaper (the Powder Valley Echo) and a good school.

Today North Powder is a town of some 400 people in the midst of a rich agriculture and livestock area. It has a big grain elevator, good sawmill, good grade and high school, city library and the usual business and civic organization found in a stable American community.

## ORO DELL:

Late in the fall of 1861, George Fox came into the valley to build a sawmill for Chas. Fox and Stephen Coffin. In 1862 the mill was finished on the Grande Ronde River at the foot of the hill which later was named after him. Others joined these and soon a trading post was developing, inappropriately called "Speak-Easy". The town location was a little dell at the foot of the mountains which suggested to Captain Harlow, a resident of the community, the name Oro Dell, oro being the Greek word for mountains. This name was submitted to the Postal Department and was accepted.

By 1865 the little town was building along its streets in an orderly fashion with two streets running east and west and two running north and south. In 1873 there were several stores, blacksmith shops and wagon shops, two hotels, and a school house. The greater part of the business district was built on the north side of the river. The Hall Hotel was on that

side also. Fanny Hall taught a private school, also Methodist services and Sunday School were held in this hotel. The first subscription school was held in a small building and taught by Lafe Davis.



The old Mill at Oro Dell, later used as electric power plant for La Grande



A cabin near Oro Dell

The school district was organized in 1873 and they bought a building which had been built by Mr. W. J. Snodgrass. Finally in 1897 the school was moved and is now Riverside School.

Mr. Snodgrass was the leading citizen who maintained large merchandising establishments there and operated the flour mill. The little town was at the peak of its development in 1882 and '83, and predicted that the coming of the railroad would make Oro Dell the chief town of the county. The railroad survey took in a great deal of the property and put the yards in La Grande.

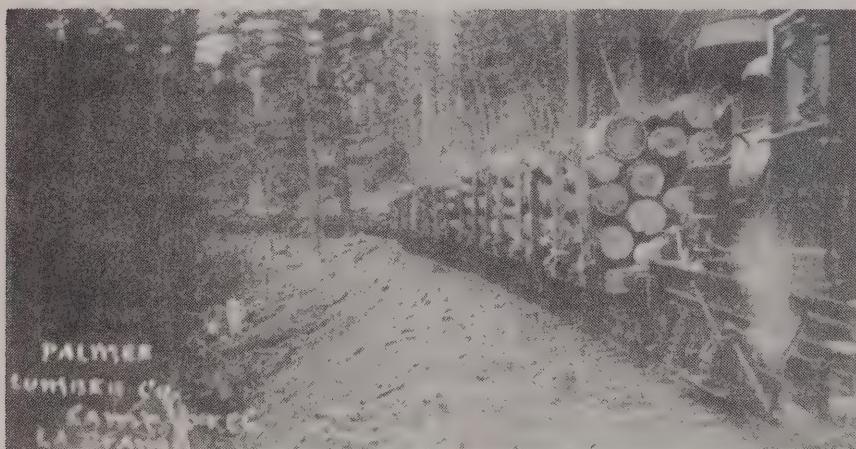
Mr. Snodgrass and others moved their businesses to La Grande and in time the little town was nothing more than a few residences. Today all that remains of Oro Dell is a marker on the highway naming that section of the road to the Grande Ronde Hospital Oro Dell Boulevard.

### PALMER JUNCTION:

See Palmer Valley.

## PALMER VALLEY:

About two and a half miles above the junction of the Grande Ronde River and the Wallowa River, the Looking Glass River enters the Grande Ronde from the Northwest. In the triangle between these two rivers are a good many square miles of comparatively level country a few hundred feet above the rivers which flow in canyons. This flat country is drained by Cabin Creek and Shoddy Creek.



LOGGING IN PALMER VALLEY

It was completely covered with beautiful yellow pine timber, so thick that homesteaders saw little value in it for grazing or agriculture and few settled there. About the turn of the century an Elgin company commenced buying it up for the timber. A controlling interest in the venture passed into the ownership of the Palmer Lumber Company who planned to set up a mill to cut it. For some time the question was would the mill be in Elgin or La Grande.

The building of the railroad to Wallowa made an outlet. It would be logged by a company road down Shoddy Creek to connect with the main line at the mouth of the Looking Glass River. The log cars would be switched to the main line and since they were loaded and going they would be taken on into

La Grande. At the junction of the logging road and the main line the Palmer Lumber Company set up a trading post under the management of Frank Baker and on April 17, 1909, he became the Postmaster of Palmer Junction.

Temporary tracks were laid from place to place in Palmer Valley and the big pine logs loaded on cars. A Shay engine operated by Ed Gettings gathered up the loaded cars and took them down the extremely crooked and steep road in Shoddy Creek canyon. Gettings tells of many thrills of these days and how he learned to take 20 cars of logs down the creek at a time rather than just 3 or 4; the long trains would bind against the wheel flanges on the sharp curves, some of which were 7 percent grade, and act more effectively as a brake than his air brakes.



#### PALMER VALLEY TODAY

From 1908 to 1914, a full train load of logs went each day from Palmer Valley to the Palmer Mill in La Grande. Ed Gettings estimates the total at 270,000,000 ft., nearly all of high grade yellow pine. During these days an average of 300 men were employed in the valley; one time there was 750.

Logged off land was sold to farmers who with much labor have removed the stumps and today it

is an agriculture area. The crooked railroad grade down Shoddy creek has been straightened and widened to become part of a good rocked surface highway to Elgin. The post office has been discontinued and the area served by a star route from Elgin. The name has slowly changed to Looking Glass, the name the railroad station is now called. The Bates Lumber Company now has a modern sawmill of 75,000 ft. per shift capacity at Looking Glass. They saw logs trucked in from long distances north in the old Indian land of Walua. A well graded and graveled logging road leads all of the way north to Troy in Wallowa county.



**LOOKING GLASS STATION—Sawmill just beyond out of sight  
PERRY:**

Perry is located five miles west of La Grande on the Grande Ronde River. Perry was first known as "Stumptown" but the name was later changed to Perry in honor of an early railroad dispatcher in La Grande. For many years Perry was the site of the Grande Ronde Lumber Company's large mill.



**PERRY — Home of the Grande Ronde Ronde Lumber Co.**

**PONDOSA:**

One mile south of Medical Springs on the upper end of Big Creek, Justus Wright took up a homestead in the early 1880's. This property had passed to the ownership of Claud Turner when the Stoddard Lumber Company purchased it in 1926 for a sawmill location. The company had extensive timber holdings in the hills to the east and were moving a modern band mill from Perry.

A twelve mile long railroad was built to the main-line Union Pacific tracks at Telocaset. Extensive logging roads were constructed in the hills. Buildings were put up for the 80,000 ft. capacity mill and planer and some 75 residences were built for workers. On September 28, 1927, the post office of Pondosa was established.

During the construction period the Collins Lumber Company acquired ownership. Pondosa was a busy, happy community of mill workers and loggers. The town had a four room school, store, splendid pressure water system, and even a paved road to Union and Baker. Cars and cars of lumber and wood pro-



AIR VIEW OF PONDOSA



SALE DAY AT STORE AT PONDOSA

ducts were going out over the railroad; products were manufactured from the vast forests of the hills to the east.

Eventually a big lumber company bought the property and soon, March 1, 1959, they announced the mill would be closed. There was still plenty of timber in the hills. The closing seemed to be just an economic move. On May 5, 1959, the mill and town of Pondosa was sold at public auction, "lock, stock

and barrel". Men who were born and grew up in the little town, took jobs in the mill and established homes, were to see the mill and their homes go under the auctioneer's hammer, not because they were insolvent, but because timber titans were maneuvering for control of forests.



#### PONDOSA THE GHOST TOWN

The railroad went for scrap. The machinery in the mill brought little. Some of the mill buildings went for salvage; part caught fire and burned. Dwellings sold very cheap, because they must be moved to have any value.

At this time surveys were locating the exact center of the 50 states of the United States. It was established 11 miles northeast in the high hills. Newspapers saw material for a good story and across our land and even in foreign countries papers carried stories about the town in the center of the United States selling at public auction.

The busy, happy little American town of Ponderosa was being put to death. Was it crushed by progress or by greed? To the worker who must load his belongings in a truck, leave the only home he ever knew and seek a new job and a new shelter for his family, it was a tragedy.

Today Ponderosa is no longer a post office. At the old mill site is a large sawdust pile slowly rotting from the elements, rows and rows of gravel strips that were once in the big lumber yards, wrecks of some big sheds, and barren residential streets. These graveled treets are lined with old concrete foundations and parts of garages and out buildings not worth salvaging. Shrubbery and shade trees are crippled and dying for lack of water and care. Man has gone; all is still down main street, just the wind drifting dead leaves here and there.

### **PYLE:**

Present name of old passing track called Bacon.

### **RINEHART:**

Rinehart was a railroad station about half way between Imbler and Elgin, named for a family who lived close by, now abandoned.

### **SANDRIDGE:**

This post office was approximately half way from Summerville to Union on the old stage route in the northeast part of section 16, township 2 south, range 39 east. It was established on April 6, 1875 with Cyrus G. Enloe as first postmaster. For several months it was closed and finally on July 9, 1877 it was discontinued. The name was taken from a local topographic feature.

### **SLATER:**

Slater was a post office with an unusually short life. It was situated at about the center of township

2 south, range 39 east in the Grande Ronde Valley at or near the site of an earlier office, Sand Ridge, and on the stage road from Summerville to Union. It was established June 9, 1881 with Stowell L. Payne, the first and only postmaster. On January 31, 1882 it was discontinued and the business transferred to Summerville. James H. Slater of Union County was United States senator when the office was established and it was named in his honor.

### SEGO:

Sego is a passing track some three miles west of Telocaset. It was first called Eams, which was too nearly like Haines. The old post office of Cromwell was near Sego.

### SPOUT SPRINGS:

At an elevation of 5200 feet, where the Old Walla Walla Trail follows the top of the mountain is this spring. In early days it was piped into a trough, into which it spouted its crystal clear waters under a



One of Lodge Buidings at Spout Springs

slight pressure, and people thought of it as the spring that spouted forth. The National Forest Service erected the Spout Springs Lookout on a hill east of the spring, but otherwise it had little prominence. It was just a refreshing spring handy for travelers, a place to picnic, and well located for huckleberry pickers. The trail that led past it had become a road, and then it became a paved highway.

It is in a land of deep snows, a dangerous land for winter travel. It was near here where Mr. Woodward, who owned the toll road, rebuilt across the mountain in 1879, perished. One winter on skis and pulling a hand sled on his way to Tollgate he vanished. A broken ski and a handkerchief were the only traces that were ever found of him.



Cars Parked at Spout Springs February 1948 - Note snow depth



One of First Ski Tows at Spout Springs

In 1934 Umatilla and Union county ski fans organized the Blue Mountain Ski Club with Pat Mansfield of Milton-Freewater as president. For two years they skied about eight miles up on the Weston side and a few miles above Elgin. As the roads could be kept

open they moved from time to time higher up until in 1940 some reached Spout Springs.

Members of the club from both sides cooperated in 1936 in an effort to have Highway 204 kept open during the winter. In 1940 this was accomplished.



#### **Snap Shots at Spout Springs**

Since the road to Spout Springs was opened for year-round travel, each season has seen more improvements. It has become second only to the Mt. Hood resort in importance in the state, drawing patronage from a big Columbia Basin area. More tows have been added, more accommodations built, more parking space added, and electric lights installed for night skiing.

On March 5 and 6, 1949, the first National Cross Country Championship was held at Spout Springs. In the summer of 1955, standard jumping hills were built, and that December the United States cross-country Olympic team stayed at Spout Springs and trained for the Olympic games to be held at Cortina, Italy. Following their training, another national cros-country championship meet was held.

Today Spout Springs is a playland, at rest during the very short summer, but when the long winters come it sees rotary snow plows cut deep canals through the snow so streams of cars may travel to the snow covered resort. Weekends find throngs of folks enjoying their frolic in the snow under electric lights. Eight and ten feet of snow is no longer a hazard, it is just a clean white blanket spread over mother earth on which her children may play.

## STARKEY:

The Starkey settlement encompasses the southwestern part of Union County and lies within the Meadow Creek (alias Starkey Creek) drainage.

### Pioneering -

This stock-raising community, which first centred about the McCoy ranch (present-day Thomas place), owes its name to the pioneer, Fred Starkey, who died there in the early '70's. Settlement began near the confluence of Meadow Creek and McCoy Creek (alias Ensing Creek) in the early 1860's. It is near this landmark that adventurers such as Robert Stewart (1812 founder of the Oregon Trail), Captain Bonneville and Peter Skene Ogden, camped on their trail blazing journeys across the Blue Mountains. The locale was also a favorite summer encampment for Cayuse Indians.



#### FRED STARKEY HOMESITE

The homesite and unmarked grave of Fred Starkey in the foreground overlooks Meadow Creek about one-half mile above the confluence of Meadow and McCoy Creeks.

The McCoy ranch was an early stage stop and supply center on the Daley Road. This road, incorporated in 1863, was a direct route between the Powder Valley and the Columbia Trail and Landing via the Pilot Rock bluffs (hence the town by the same name). Though the general use of this road as an emigrant trail was short-lived (1863-1868), it continued for years to be the primary access to Starkey. It was occasionally used by emigrant trail herds coming west and often used as a driveway for herds trailing to eastern markets until about 1900.

Travel from Starkey to the Grande Ronde Valley was not customary until about 1890, when a road improvement program became effective. Before this there were 31 river crossings between Starkey and La Grande which made travel hazardous and prohibitive during high water.

The "Battleground", a few miles southwest of Starkey, was the scene of the last serious Indian encounter in northeastern Oregon. In July of 1878, the warring Snake Indians retreated into the Starkey region, having suffered heavy losses in the battle of the Umatilla Reservation. The neutral Cayuse Indians then sided with the army and pursued the renegade tribes into the mountains.

Starkey settlers fortified themselves at the McCoy ranch and awaited the enemy. Meanwhile a Cayuse war party killed the Snake chief and later overtook and defeated the outlaws in a fierce battle just south of Starkey near the head of Battle Creek.

The main forces of the army garrisoned at the McCoy ranch, greatly relieving the frightened settlers. Though no white man actually took part in this final engagement, Onley McCoy, who was raised on McCoy Creek, and three other freighters were massacred in Dead Man's Pass just prior to this final battle.

### ***Settlement —***

Starkey was a thriving community in the late '80's with most available farmland homesteaded. A school was built on the F. A. Alden place in 1888. Enrollment through the '90's was often in excess of fifty pupils.

Eighteen hundred ninety-three was a year of tragedy for Starkey as diphtheria raged throughout the region. Nearly every family in the Starkey area lost at least one child.

The cemetery was located on the wooded hill about one-half mile east of the school house and just south of the Press Burnett ranch (later Jess Plunket place). The cemetery was on Wyman French's home- stead and first used in 1889. Although it is the final



#### J. C. BRIGGS RANCH

Pioneer activity on the J. C. Briggs ranch (present Claude Wright place) in 1903. Pictured from left to right are: Elam Briggs, Scott and Oba Burnett, Bill Beaumont, Jim Briggs (standing), Andrew Prell, Mrs. Jim Briggs and two daughters. The matched four-horse team driven by Oba Burnett was sold for \$1,000 at Sumpter in 1905.

resting place for scores of people, only six graves can now be identified by name.

The general collapse of the stock market, which also occurred in 1893, left Starkey ranchers with live-stock that was hardly worth gathering off the range.

#### *Development —*

Winter horse logging and spring log drives began in the early '90's and provided many Starkey families with an additional source of income. Ten ranchers drew up a partnership and brought the first saw-mill into Starkey in 1893. It was freighted up the river from the Glass place (later Condit ranch) and set up on the Ed Geese ranch (now part of the old



#### STARKEY SCHOOL

School days at Starkey in 1907. Those pictured from left to right are: Ruby Briggs, Florence Burnett, Eva Briggs, Priscilla and Unis Alden, Vada, Elma, Willy, and Charlie Briggs; and Warren Burnett. The materials for the school were freighted from Stumptown (Perry) in 1888.

W. H. Briggs place between Meadow and McCoy Creeks). S. F. Richardson had owned this mill and was sawing logs on Longly Meadow near the mouth of Jordan Creek. At the Starkey mill sites, logs cut from McCoy Creek, mostly about the Pete Smith place were sawed and the lumber sold to local residents or freighted to Pendleton which brought \$10.00 per thousand board feet.

After 1895, logging was commonplace throughout the Starkey area. The Grande Ronde Lumber Company with mills at Stump Town (Perry) often had over 200 men in the woods returning between 15 and 20 million feet of logs annually.

During the '60's and '70's, activity had centered on lower Meadow Creek. The rapid expansion and



#### LOG DRIVE

Log driving on the Grande Ronde River provided additional income for many Starkey families. This jam is on the river bar near what was known as the Russell Grade (across from the old "Jap Camp") in the Spring of 1904.

settlement of the '80's and '90's to the south and west brought the focal point of activity up on the prairie and several miles south. There Andy Sullivan opened a general supply store in 1895 and also acquired the post office that year.

The first Starkey post office was established by Frank Dun in 1889. In 1890 he relinquished the position to Press Burnett who, in turn, gave it over to Andy Sullivan in 1895.

Sullivan arrived at Starkey in 1888 with over 2,000 head of wild horses from the Horse Heaven Hills in southeast Washington. He expanded his holding by purchase of adjacent homesteads, one being that of pioneer Len Marley, hence the name Marley Creek. Sullivan diversified his operations until with the store and post office, his ranch was often referred to as

"town". In 1900, the Starkey store was reported to have grossed \$10,000 in sales. Many early-day sheep and cattle outfits packed supplies and salt from the Sullivan place to their summer grazing headquarters.

Livestock grazing played a significant role in the development of the Starkey community. In 1895, with the recent creation of the Forest Reserves, grazing of public land came under the first measure of control. Later users of these forested lands organized associations to graze their permitted livestock.



#### STARKEY CATTLE AND HORSE ASSOCIATION

Members of the Starkey Cattle and Horse Association gather at Five-Points for their annual business meeting in 1940. Standing are pictured from left to right: W. H. Briggs, Forest Ranger Rube Butler, Charles Umbarger, Forest Supervisor Carl Ewing and Phil Umbarger. Kneeling are Alfred Cunha and Le Sullivan, grandson of Andy Sullivan. These men and their forefathers represent pioneer stock of the Starkey grazing industry.

Because the Starkey allotment and association typified many forest areas in the Pacific Northwest, it was later selected as the site for a Forest Service range experiment station.



#### **OLD STARKEY COW CAMP**

This landmark is now known as the old Starkey Cow Camp and was originally the Pete Evenson homestead. It is located on Meadow Creek about one-half mile below the mouth of Bear Creek. Photo circa 1900.

#### ***Starkey Today —***

The original nature of this land for crops and the trends of industrialization wrote the fate of this community. The region has reverted to a grassland agriculture and its people to only seasonal habitation. This area which once supported hundreds of people has not a year-long resident who derives his livelihood from the land. A once-thriving community lies dead in the dust of modern society.

#### **SUMMERVILLE:**

An old Umatilla trail came into the Grande Ronde Valley across the mountain near Ruckle, down Finley and Willow Creeks and then cut southeast into the northwest part of the valley. When the Thomas and Ruckles road was built it followed this general route and entered the valley along the old trail, which accounts for the road and main street through Summerville being at the same angle as the old trail.

While the Thomas and Ruckles road was being built, a town called Winter was started about two miles northwest of the present Summerville, on land now owned by May Colt. This town had a store, hotel and blacksmith shop. At the completion of the road in 1865 a petition was circulated for a post office. However, Henry Rinehart circulated another petition for a post office nearer to the center of population. Rinehart secured the most signatures and was granted the office. Snow still lingered in the timber at Winter and it had melted away at Rinehart's location, so it was decided to call the new office Summerville and on May 30, 1865, William Patten became the postmaster.



#### MAIN STREET OF SUMMERVILLE MANY YEARS AGO

Henry Rinehart built the first house and had opened a meat market on May 1, 1865. Soon after the post office was located other business establishments sprang up. Within a year there were a doctor and preacher in town, and a flour mill was being built about a mile north of the post office by Hanna and Wright. This was soon sold to three Rinehart broth-

ers, and J. H. Rinehart continued to operate the mill for years. In 1885 the Mortgage and Savings Bank of Summerville was opened, and in 1889 the Summerville Annotator was published.

Summerville claims the distinction of being the first town in the county to become incorporated. For years it was the only town north of La Grande and Island City. From 1865 to 1887 its frontier location made it the most typically "western" of all the valley towns. With its many saloons and large brewery, old timers stated that the poker games went on day and night with occasional gun play to add further life to the community.

Many interesting stories are told of things that happened in Summerville during those days. One is told about a Doctor LeBurr who settled in the town during the stagecoach days when gold was shipped from the mines to Walla Walla in a "strong box" guarded by the stage driver. The people must have been healthy, for the doctor was not able to thrive on the renumeration of the too few patients. He and two other men decided to rob the stage one night, having obtained firsthand information that a gold shipment was going through. The coach line must have also heard of the intended hold-up and placed rocks in the strong box. When the men stopped the stage and demanded the box the driver kicked it off without a struggle. Dr. LeBurr and one of the men were eventually apprehended and served their debt to society. When released from prison Dr. LeBurr returned to his practice at Summerville. Someone then asked him why he returned to where all knew his story and reputation. His reply was that when something is lost, the place to find it is where it was lost.

The transcontinental railroad went over the

mountain from La Grande instead of through the mountain west of Summerville. The branch line railroad to Indian Valley and later to Wallowa went east of Summerville and built a station at Imbler. Business shifted to other towns and Summerville became a quiet little community. To add to its troubles, the many wooden buildings were vulnerable to fire, and like many other early towns built of wood, Summerville suffered disastrous fires.

Today Summerville is just a village in a very rich agricultural area of the valley. Around it are grass seed fields excelled by none in the nation. Paved roads lead to Imbler and Elgin, and La Grande can be reached over two different paved routes.

### TELOCASET:

At the head of Pyle Canyon south of Union there is a fertile little valley on the divide into the Powder River country. In early days antelope ranged in here and it received its name "Antelope Valley" for that reason. Still farther south but yet in Union county is another valley along the Powder river which has been called "Thief Valley" since December, 1864, when



Store at Telocaset

John Wetherly was hanged there for stealing mules from an emigrant at Boise. Of late years a reservoir has been built on the river in Thief Valley to store water for irrigation farther down the Powder river.



**Depot at Telocaset**



**TELOCASET, OREGON**

Thief and Antelope valleys are located in an area of rolling rangeland and their comparative seclusion made them attractive to fugitives from the law in pioneer days. Early day cattle thieves that operated in adjoining counties are said to have maintained hide-out stations in this area.



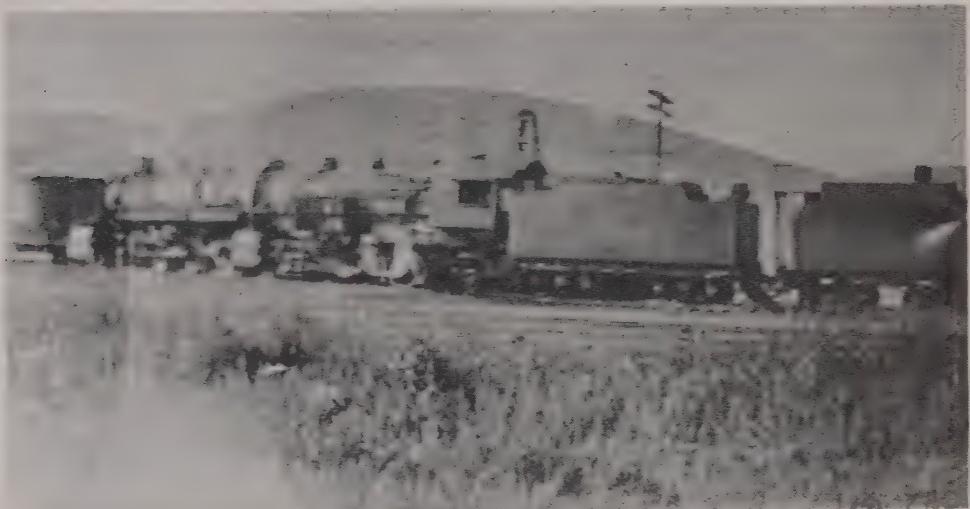
**Old Timer in front of old time Telocaset store**

During the days before the building of the railroad, Antelope Valley was a stage station, part of the time on the main line from Baker to the coast.

In the early 1880's the transcontinental railroad was building and Antelope Valley, being at the divide on top of the hill, became the location for water tanks, coal bunkers and helper engines to bring the heavy train up the hill from Union. The railroad asked Dr. William C. McKay to suggest station names that duplicated no other Oregon place names. Among the suggestions was Telocaset. This word is from

the Nez Perce language and means a thing at the top, or put on top, such as a tree growing on a hill, summit or plateau, overlooking a valley. The Indians pronounced it "Taulekarsset" according to O. H. Lipps of Fort Lapwai Indian Agency, Idaho.

On February 25, 1885, some two months after the post office at Cromwell three miles to the west was closed, an office was opened at Telocaset with William A. Gates first postmaster.



Steam Train pulls into Telocaset

Telocaset grew to be a busy little railroad town amid the rich little Antelope Valley and its big surrounding area of cattle country. Many good springs in the surrounding hills make this a good stock country.

The coming of diesel locomotives cut down on the railroad business at the little helper station. The abandonment of the branch railroad to Pundosa has taken away that business. School bus transportation has taken high school students away to school, and further consolidation threatens to close school in the pretty little two-room school house at Telocaset.

Seventy bushel wheat still grows in the rich little Antelope Valley, and fat Hereford cattle pasture over the sage studded hillsides for miles around, but life is quiet and serene in the wide open spaces of the little station on top of the hill.

## UNION:

In the extreme southeast corner of Grande Ronde Valley, Pyles Canyon enters from the south and Catherine Creek Canyon from the southeast. Air currents seem to keep this fertile corner of the valley quite free from frost. We are not sure just when Conrad Miller came to the valley and looked the country over, but early in 1862 he left a cabin that he had built in what is now west Union to go to Vancouver for supplies to start a nursery. It was fall before he returned, to find that his claim had been occupied by Fred Nodine and others.



Recent birds-eye view of Union, taken from hill east of town

However, when Miller told his story his claim was returned to him and he proceeded to establish one of the first nurseries in this area, selling his fruit trees for one dollar each. That same fall of 1862, Fred Nodine, J. A. J. Chapman, E. H. Lewis, D. S. Henry, P. N. Coffin, Cutting Clark, J. Hinkley, and A. H. Busick also took claims close by, and there was quite a logging operation as logs were cut on Catherine Creek and moved to the various locations to build the many cabins. It is said that they used mostly cottonwood logs which were close at hand along the creek. They worked as a group and all helped on building each individual cabin. It was well into the winter before all were built.



**CHARIOT RACE — Early Union Stock Show**

J. A. J. Chapman, later the first assessor of Union County, had some knowledge of surveying and helped his neighbors lay out their claim. When the government survey was made in 1864, Chapman's lines were found almost perfectly located. Chapman's

claim was on the south side of Catherine Creek, and he built his cabin on the northwest corner of the claim, on what is now the site of the Union Drug Store. Three other claims cornered here and each owner built in these corners. The result was that from this corner Chapman's buildings were on the southeast, Nodine on the northeast, N. H. Lewis, northwest, with Conrad Miller close by, and Busick on the southwest. Thus the four sets of buildings astride the creek with other settlers close around formed the heart of the new community.

Almost immediately this settlement became a freight transfer station for the mines. Wagons brought supplies from The Dalles and Umatilla, but as there was no road to the mines, freight was unloaded at Chapman's cabin and moved on up Pyles Canyon or Catherine Creek by packtrain. As a result of his location Chapman stocked supplies for the freighters and miners and came to operate the first store in Union.

David Thompson, a professional surveyor, laid out the town of Union on Chapman's land in 1864, and the plat was registered November 11, 1864. The events of the Civil War caused the town of Union to receive its name as an expression of loyalty to the North. Local women used red, white and blue cloth to sew together the first flag made in the county, and it was flown at a little community Fourth of July celebration in 1863. On November 17, 1865, a post office was established at Union, Oregon, with J. A. J. Chapman as postmaster.

For many years Union was the supply center for the mines to the south. Sawmills were soon erected. In 1865 a flour mill was built and grain, fruit and livestock were becoming important sources of income. Union and La Grande were rivals to become the city

in the new county. Many elections were held over the location of the county seat which was at Union from 1872-1904. The Union Republic is the oldest newspaper in the county. For over a half century Union has been the home of the Eastern Oregon Experiment Station and the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show, both of which have become well known and well supported by the counties of eastern Oregon.



#### CENTRAL R. R. of OREGON and UNION FLOUR MILL

An interesting industry of Union was founded in 1897 when J. H. Hutchinson, Abel E. Eaton, W. R. Hutchinson, N. Tarter, H. C. Susiwend, J. M. Carroll, and Samuel Truesdale incorporated the Union Woolen Mill Company and installed a plant to manufacture woolen blankets and cloth. The original building was in west Union, a 50 x 100 ft. three-story building. Machinery was first powered by water from Catherine Creek.

At first the mill met with limited success, but in 1900 Mr. Eaton purchased a controlling interest of stock and hired J. P. Wilbur, a well experienced manager, and from that the time the business went ahead. Additional building and machinery were installed. Local wool was purchased, but supplies came from as

far as Huntington and the Palouse country. It is interesting to note that the records show that the purchasing price of wool ranged from 10 to  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents per pound.

The new management installed heat in the mill for the comfort of the workers which reached 40 in number. Wages ranged from 85 cents per day for women to \$2.00 for the most skilled help. Working hours were slightly over 10 hours per day and they quit work at 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays instead of at 6:00 p.m.



#### UNION JUNCTION

Besides selling to the Pacific Coast stores they had customers like Wanamaker & Son of Philadelphia, Marshall Field & Co. of Chicago, John Marsh & Co. of Boston, etc.

In 1907, Mr. Eaton, who was well in his seventies, retired and Mr. Wilbur became interested in other mills. The once very successful business closed and

was never reopened. Like the highly successful wood products plant at Elgin in later years, when highly competent management was lost, a thriving industry folded up.

Today Union is a city of 1400 people, well built, amid a good agricultural area, with two sawmills, good schools, and at the focus of four paved roads, one to La Grande, one to North Powder, one to Medical Springs and Baker, and one to Cove.

### **UNION JUNCTION:**

Railroad station for Union. Terminal of the Central Railroad of Oregon.

### **WINTER:**

Two miles north of Summerville where the town first started. See story on Summerville.







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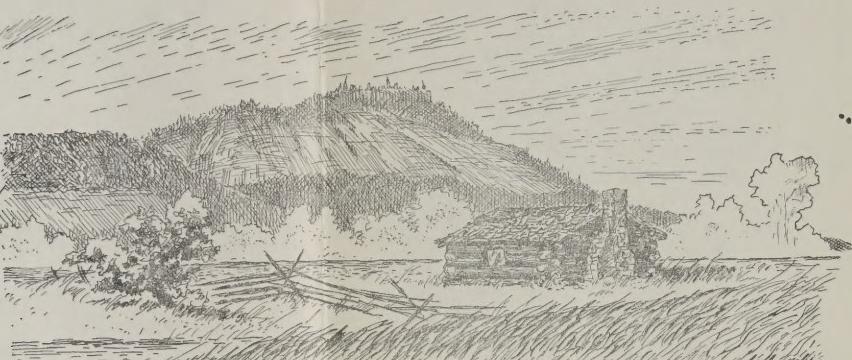
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KAROLTON KLASP—5½ x 8½  
"MADE IN U. S. A."  
THE AMERICAN ENVELOPE CO.  
WEST CARROLLTON, OHIO

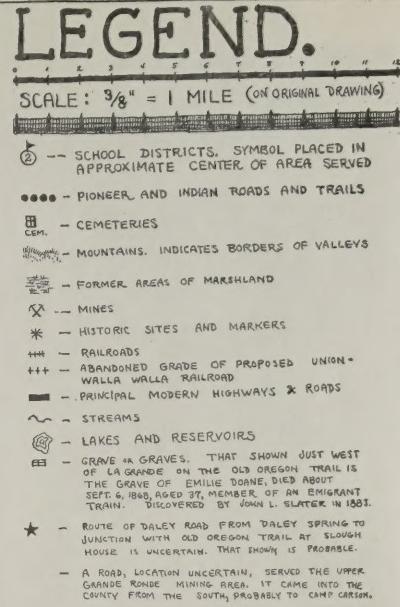
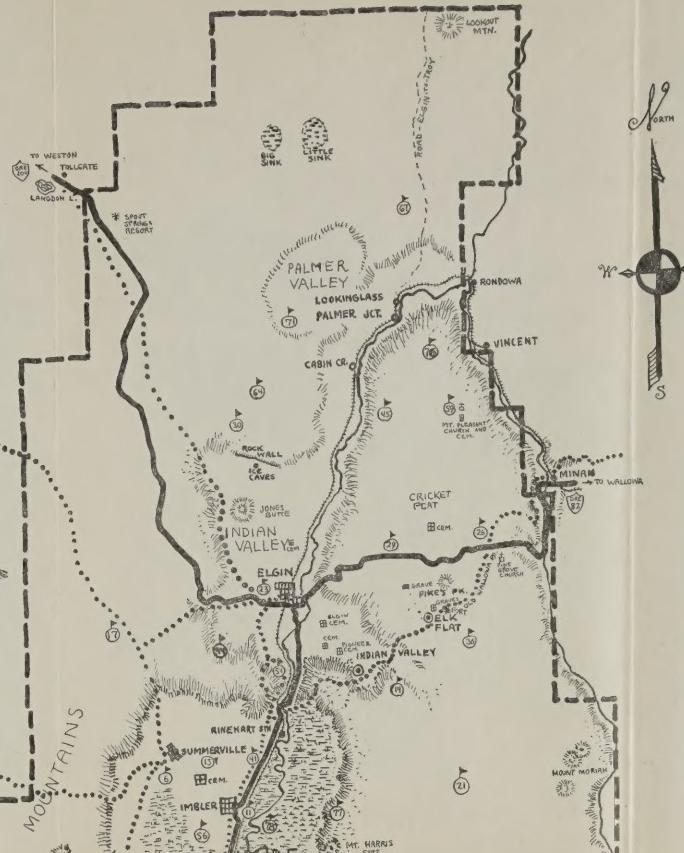


*The Historical Map*  
OF  
**UNION COUNTY**,  
OREGON.



DRAWN BY JOHN W. EVANS - FEBRUARY 1961 - FOR THE UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

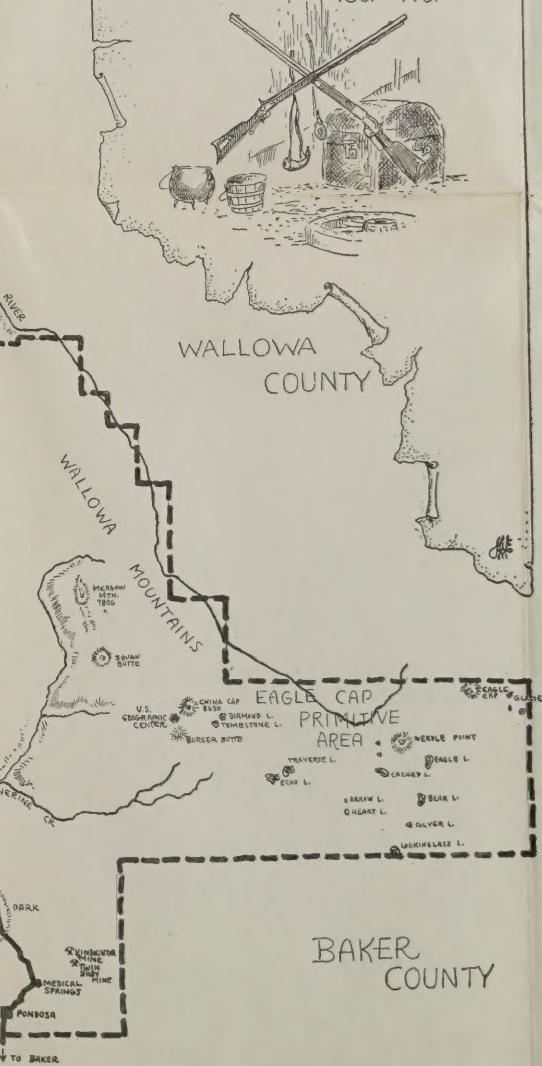
UMATILLA COUNTY



CENTENNIAL  
1861-1961



WALLOWA  
COUNTY



BAKER  
COUNTY

